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MOUNTAIN CLOUD

A BOOK of CLOUDS

by

WILLIAM A. QUAYLE



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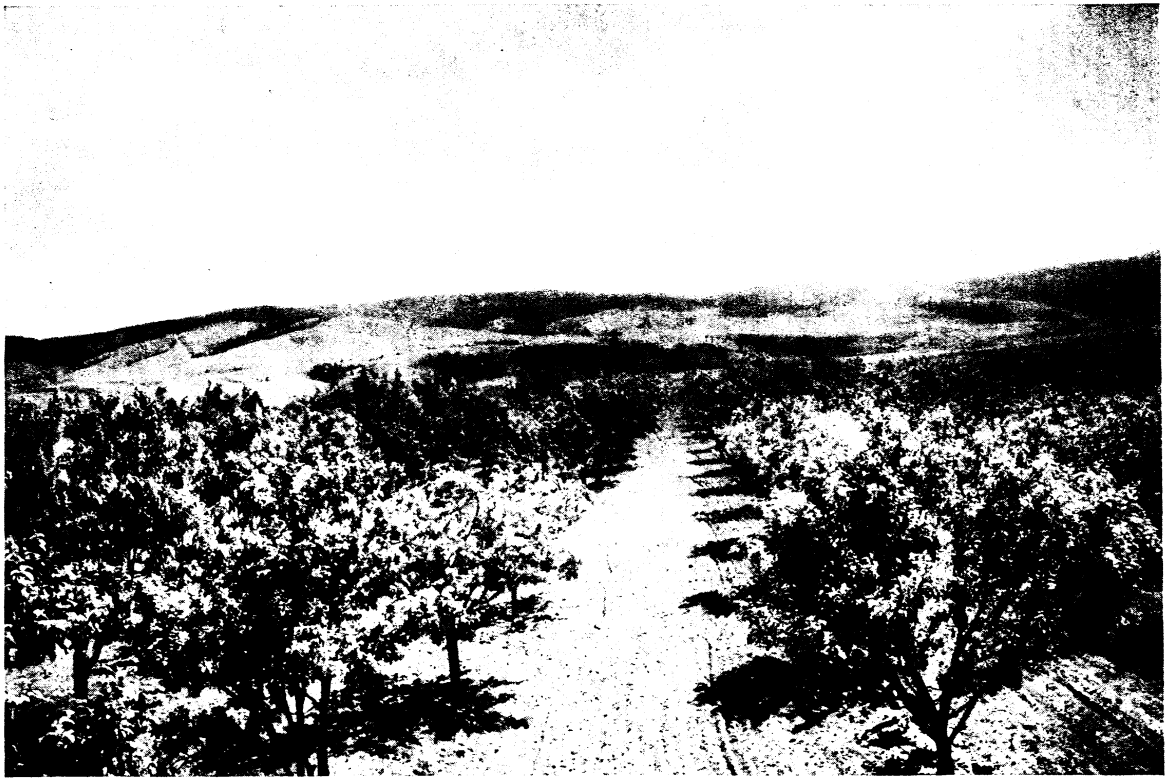
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CLOUDS

FROM a child I loved the clouds and neighbored with them. As I recall the valley of my child life and how the clouds floated over that little stretch of soul, it was mainly after this wise:

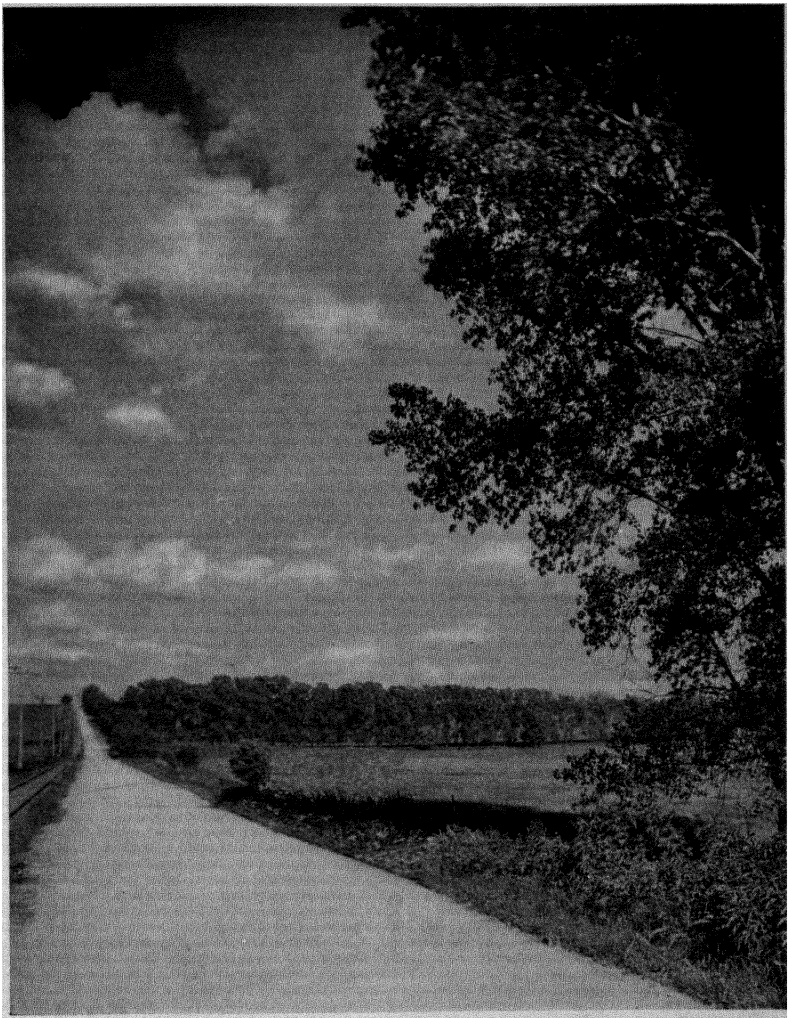
I was motherless and my father was absent, always absent—he being a gold miner in distant mountains—so that he was a myth to me; and my mother was in heaven. This they told me of her, and the story was precious to my orphan heart, eagering for a mother. It is quite true that a child's moods are temporary. Hurts do not hurt long at a time, but the thing we may wisely reflect on is that the hurts recur often. They come not to stay but to fly away and then on the same wings to fly back again. It was so with the motherless boy. He wanted his mother though he knew not why. Life is ever deeper than our kinsmen know; and the boy wanted his mother, as, indeed, he continues to want her now. How oddly we are contrived! How deep is our shallowness! How large is our littleness! A wee bit laddie, and lonely for his mother, and here it is that clouds come along my horizon, shifting loveliness and loneliness but always



THE LAND OF BEULAH

shifting loneliness. The clouds were high and were winged and were toward where my mother was. That is how clouds came into my life. I remember lying on my back in the summer grass, in the lonesome summer, and wistfully watching the clouds at journey far off, far up—and I was longing for my mother. They were near to her. She was in heaven, they said, and heaven was up, and the theology was sufficient to make the lad lift up his eyes; and so he saw the clouds. Thus among my earliest child memories were the clouds. I was in nothing unusual, in nothing profound, but was a lonely little boy without a father and altogether motherless—an ill-treated poor little tyke! and so I was whipped into dreaming of a mother and longing for a mother.

And across the road to where my mother was the clouds wandered. So did my æsthetic life ground itself in my heart. It has stayed there ever since. I have not found these cold and shining walls of ice hedge off my brain from my heart. Such brain as I have had has been located somewhere in my heart, and I am now beginning to think it may stay there for always, and am praying that it may. My head has never troubled me. Small things have not troubled me much. All my roads lead out of my heart. I have loved many things and wheres and folks, and have loved learning and books and pictures and statuary and architecture and byways and wild woods and wild flowers and open roads and the neighborhoods of moss



THE GOLDEN SUMMER

and bracken, stars and vague tangles, and poetry in hearts or books. Tennyson has haunted me like a faint wind among the shadows. Cradles have I loved, and graves; work have I loved, and play and vagabondage with streams and winds on moors and meadows and prairies, and felicity of sundowns, and whole worlds besides that I may not name. All things have grown rooted in the soil of my heart. If I had had no head, it would not have mattered much. I get on so well without it that I should not have missed a head. A mother bird does not regret being an empty pate. Why should I? So did my shoreless delight in nature-things begin in my lonesome little heart. The clouds wandered in the sky of my heart, O mother! mother!

Thus back behind my earliest recollections was I kinsman of the clouds. And as I grew, the clouds still sailed their crafts of snowy sail across the blue sea of my heart. Clouds, so to say, were indigenous to my soul. I did not begin to notice them: I always noticed them. I did not learn to love them: I always loved them. I did not need to have anyone point them out; my mother pointed them out; and they pointed my mother out. They were sailing whither I fain would have sailed. What a quaint way mothers have of beckoning us whether they be earth-mothers or angel-mothers!

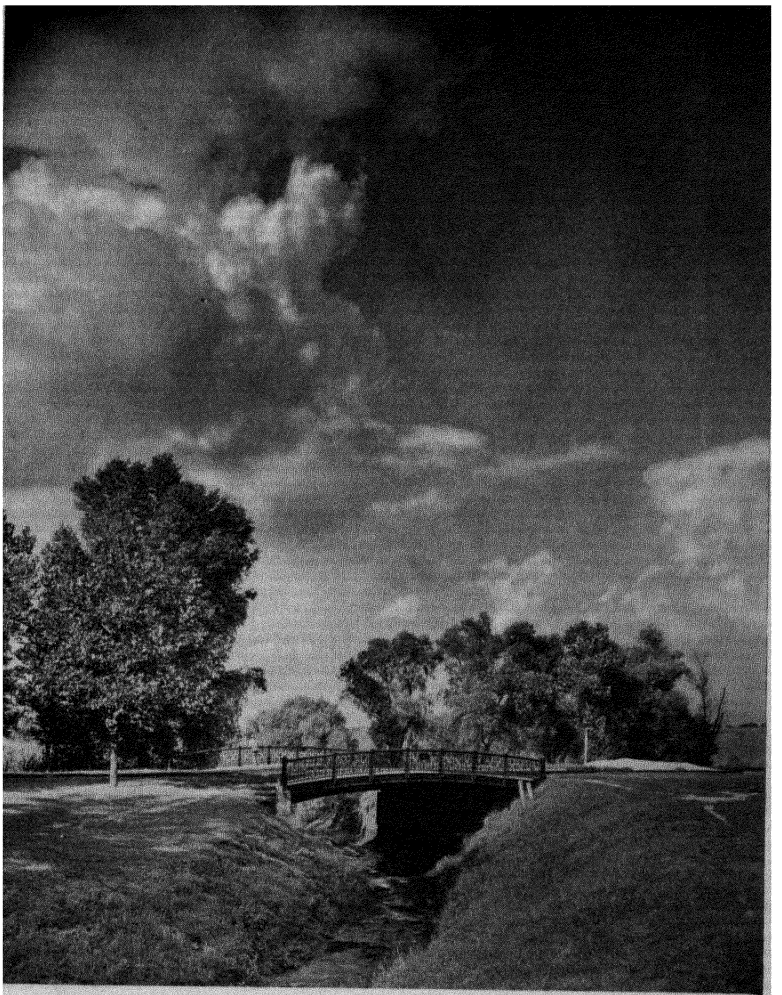
To my knowledge no one ever spoke to me of clouds till I was grown a man, and then it was Ruskin, who looks strangely like my own father! The only refer-



THE HERD

ence made to clouds in all the memories of my childhood was the stock remark about them as they related to weather. I recall no one ever having mentioned in my hearing that clouds were beautiful. What a pathos that is as I think of it now. Why did not some one tell me? I might have missed it all, as some of my neighbors have. No thanks to any voice that I did not pass all the cloud-glory by, so it had stayed viewless as the air. But my mother beckoned me, and my lonely boy-heart, wanting a kiss and a caress and having neither, grew up without caress or kiss, which I call desperate tragedy; and my lonely heart made me looker at the clouds, and being looker at the clouds I became, in beautiful logic, lover of the clouds.

When I grew to be a lad the clouds still wandered out my mother's way, and I watched them, watched them. And when I think the matter over, that is all clouds need—just watching. That is all beauty needs—just watching. How little have I ever known about things! How meager has been my portion of information about phenomena! What a thin primer my knowledge would have made!—scarce thicker than a leaf the booksellers offer from one of Caxton's precious books. But how have I watched, watched, nor ever wearied! Watcher of the skies and of the ground below them, of the seas and the clouds above them, ever a watcher have I been. And I recall how watchmen long since sighted the heavenly vision, and the shepherds, staying awake and watching the skies,



THE SILENT STREAM

beheld the vision of the angels. And so recalling, I think to remain a tireless, happy, ignorant watcher yet a while and withal for all the whiles. As a farmer boy I considered the clouds. I did not know then that the Chief Poet had bidden us consider the lilies. I read that later and did as the Chief Poet bade me. But the clouds were in my blood.

Since a child they have companied with me, and among my earliest considerations of them was their shape. They were my picture gallery, my statuary, my painting, chromo-tint and spaciousness, my mountain peaks and mountain range. I grew up in a prairie country, having met no mountain till I was a grown man, but now I know that the lordliest mountain acclivities and sinewy Sierras mine eyes have beheld were the mountain ranges of the sky. Those crests of strange proximity to heaven, those Alps that make all other Alps seem trivial, those wide, snowy ranges which build ramparts of snow round half the sky and whose glaciers burned rapturous glory in the sun, with them I grew up and scaled their inaccessible altitudes as if I had been an archangel; and then their shifting pageant, their innumerable faces and heroic galleries —here all sublime sculpture had a place. And I scanned the faces, the shifting, amazing faces of the clouds, until by and by their faces and gigantic landscapes in the clouds grew on me till I felt it necessary to stand against my appetencies to discern likenesses in the shifting figures of the clouds, and I have had to

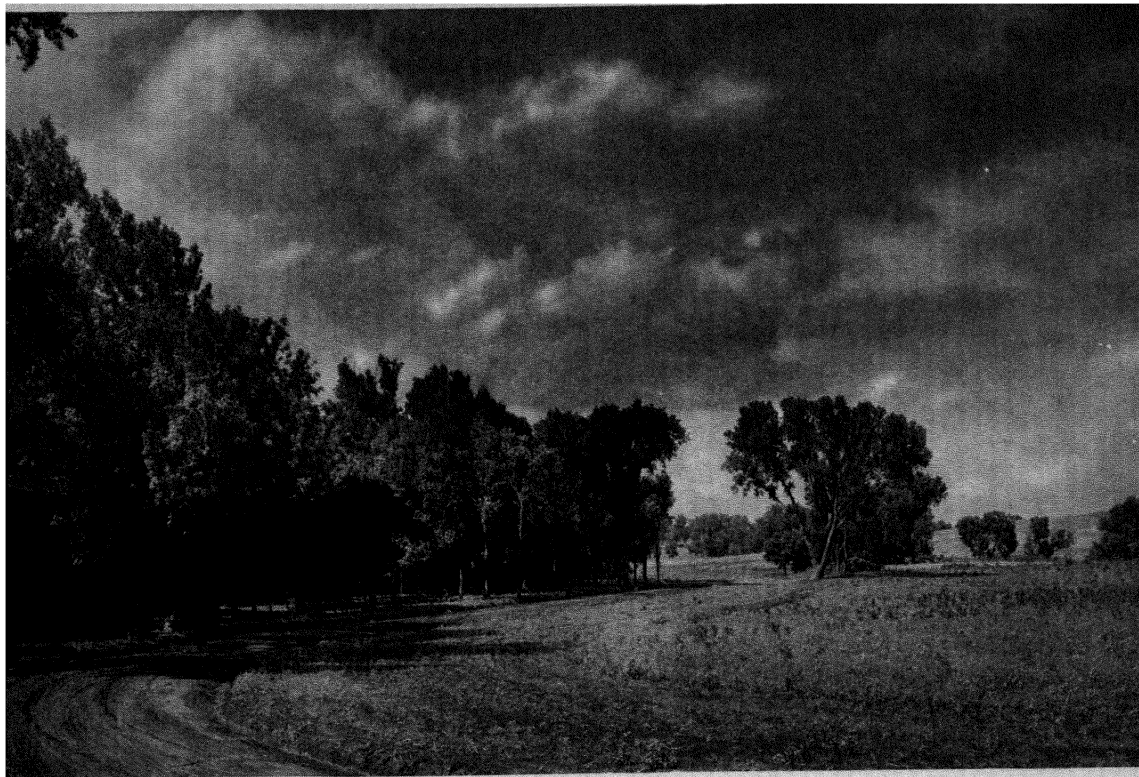


THE WIND CLOUDS

fight that instinct all my life. That way madness lies. My imagination has been too robust and has had to be striven against.

Yet so I grew up with the clouds. They were my companions, as if I were a shepherd and they my flock of sheep. They were regal to me. I had not framed a theory of them. They were there like cornfields or cattle or the smell of the hay or the smell of ripening corn. I knew no better than to love them and neighbor with them. There was no wit in it nor poetry. There was sheer witlessness. The clouds and I were alone together so much that I took up with them as I would have taken with a stray dog or a stray boy. I never mentioned the clouds any more than I mentioned my mother. Who was there to whom to mention them? I was still alone and lonesome, a farmer boy in the field and follower of the plow.

Then later the clouds' glory caught my eyes. Color builded its fires of splendor before me. I saw the sunrise, for I was a milkmaid and milkmaids arise early, not to view nature but to milk nature. Before day woke I, a freckled milkmaid, was wakened by a mandatory voice and arrived at the milk stool and the cow, and thereafter rather tardily the day shuffled in. While milking, I watched the dawns and grew neighborly with them. No wit of mine, mark you, this matriculation to the dawn and the ruddy clouds that flung out their radiant banners, but the necessity that was on me being milkmaid. While I milked I



WILL IT RAIN?

watched. Watching did not hinder milking—really it helped it. The carousal of the dawn defied the monotony of the milking. Wholly unconsciously I am tutored to meet Turner and Ruskin.

Then later on, when I came to college, beautifully poor and beautifully glad, the clouds were still swimming across my intellectual skies although I knew it not. I was as unconscious of their presence in my soul as I was unconscious of my soul. The sky was not less aware of its clouds than I of mine. And once I wrote for a college oration "The Art Gallery of the Skies," and the wise critic as he marked me down said, "It is no theme for an oration." He was accurate though not acute. It was theme for a dream. It had some instinct of a poet in it. It was denaturized of utility, but instinct with that sweet inutility wherein my life has taken singing delight. I have not been greatly given to utility. I have ever been more engrossed in a sunset than a factory site and in the beauty of a farm more than in what it yielded. Some of the students whose fingers were pincers said that in writing the aforesaid oration I plagiarized from Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. They mistook my intellectual stature. Ruskin was beyond me. I did not know enough to know Ruskin. My angel mother had introduced me to the clouds, and those immature sagacities thought it was Ruskin. In due time, having been exonerated from the charge of plagiarism from Ruskin, I betook me to Ruskin, having had this surly



DID I HEAR THUNDER?

introduction to him, and read *Frondes Agrestes.* I shall ever love that woman lover of Ruskin who squeezed so many of his books into that exquisite appreciation, *Frondes Agrestes.* So I came to read goodman Ruskin, and read all his books, and have reread them often and shall love them in the forever. And, reading from that lover of water and mountains and clouds, I found I was not amiss in my wonder at the art gallery of the skies nor awry in my sense of loveliness being its own certificate of character. This Ruskin-of-the-clouds introduced me to Turner-of-the-clouds. Oh happy day! Turner knew more about clouds than anybody since God. The clouds haunted him as shadows the windy hill. All the things he did beside were as "a tale that is told" compared with his amazing featuring of the clouds. I revel in his high artistry of clouds and think I shall revel in it for eternity. Of God it is sublimely said in the sublime Book, "He calleth the stars by their names," as is evident, for he gave them their names. I think Turner could call the clouds by their names. Never two clouds alike in his haunting imitations of them. "Thanks to the good God for J. W. M. Turner" is the import of many a thanks I have offered when looking at his skies sown to the clouds that God made, and Turner first of all men saw. Ruskin dies: the clouds abide. Turner dies: the clouds are deathless. What Turner saw I have been seeing all these blissful years. I am dweller in the clouds. They are not high nor far; they are near



THE CLOUDS BEYOND THE WOOD

at hand and neighborly. And my mother took me by the hand and led me out among them. There have I wandered ever since. And are there no clouds in heaven which she and I may some day wander toward?

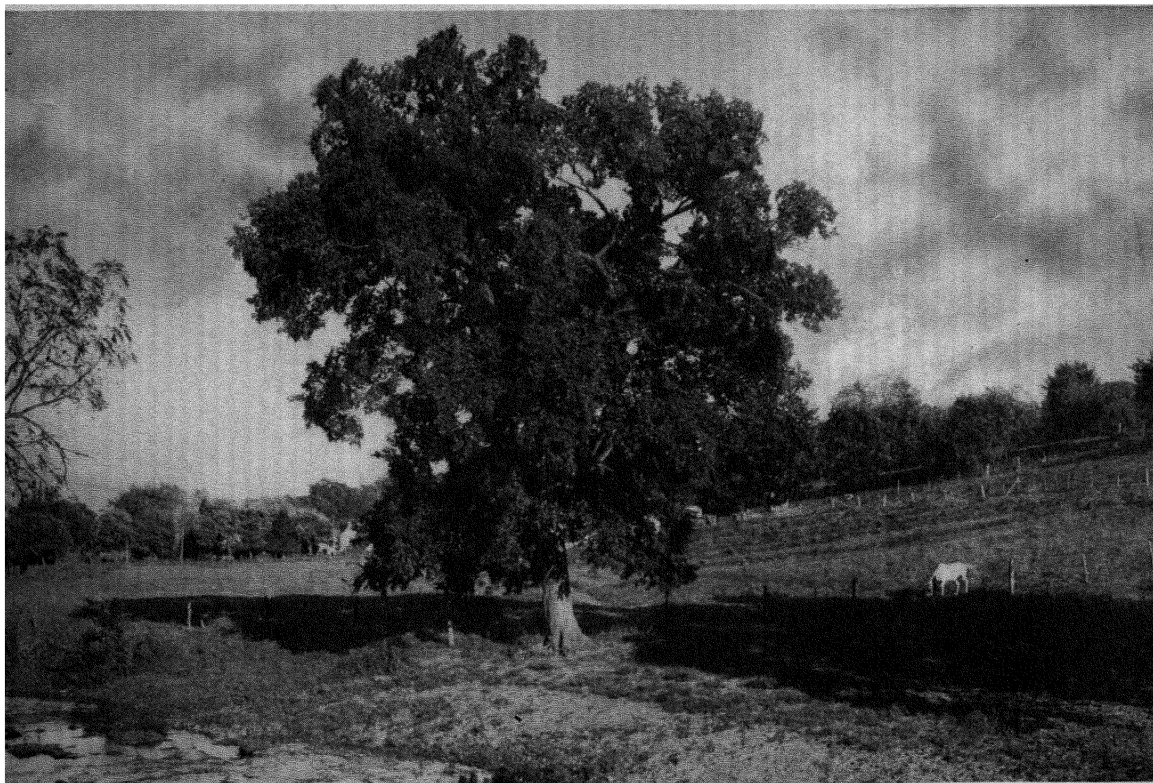
In this interpretation of clouds as pictured in this book I will say that a wider variety of cloud-likenesses has been taken than I have known photographed anywhere. Clouds, in their widest ranges, are not to be photographed successfully. The painters here have their domain uninvaded and uninvadable. Clouds are too diaphanous, too far, too unpicturable to be caught by the hand and led about the ground. Herein the cloud pictures in this book seem to the writer unusually happily interpretative of cloud witchery. Where have I not been in joyful quest for these traceries of God?

MRS. MEYNELL has an essay on unfigured wall paper, her thesis being that only on such can shadows have their play. Much more is this true in the world of earth and sky. And clouds are the contrivers of shadow. A clouded world and an unclouded world are far apart worlds. A gay day and a day of untarnished gray are so distinct as to seem unrelated. The shadow makes the difference. A floating cloud with floating shadows is instinct with poetry. Where the shadow touches even for an abbreviated moment the scene has suffered a sky change that is as curious and unexpected as Shakespeare's sea change.



THE CLOUDED LAKE

The earth is ever at the sport of this sky change. To be sure, the climb of the sun with the consequent changing of shadows from sunup to noon, and then the lengthening of shadows from noon to sunset gives a variant touch to any radiant, sun-drenched day, yet not the less are the main mysteries of shadow-play enacted by the clouds. One brief hand across the sun invites a miniature gloom. I have seen the clouds send out fleets of snowy, swift, aerial craft so that the ground was a checker work of light and shadow. You begin your song in the sunlight and you conclude your song in the shade, as if above you waved the gentleness of some far-reaching boughs of sunset grove. Clouds chase each other like swallows. They play pum-pum-pull-away like racing children. They know not nor care that earth folks are watching, being intent on their own games, though what those gypsies of the skies do in their hoyden play is to shuttle across the ground momentary murk on the stream and hill such as makes the weak, wistful voice of a sick body whisper, "Is it going to storm?" as the shadows fall on the feverish pillow, or makes the wee bird guess it nears the night, or makes the silver of a wheat field looking toward gold and harvest, to shadow like the hollow between sea waves. And then a flash like a woman's laughter, and all is zest and glory of the sun robust and triumphant! To lie on your back and watch the didos of the clouds on windy days when the clouds are small and very vagrant and unconscionably



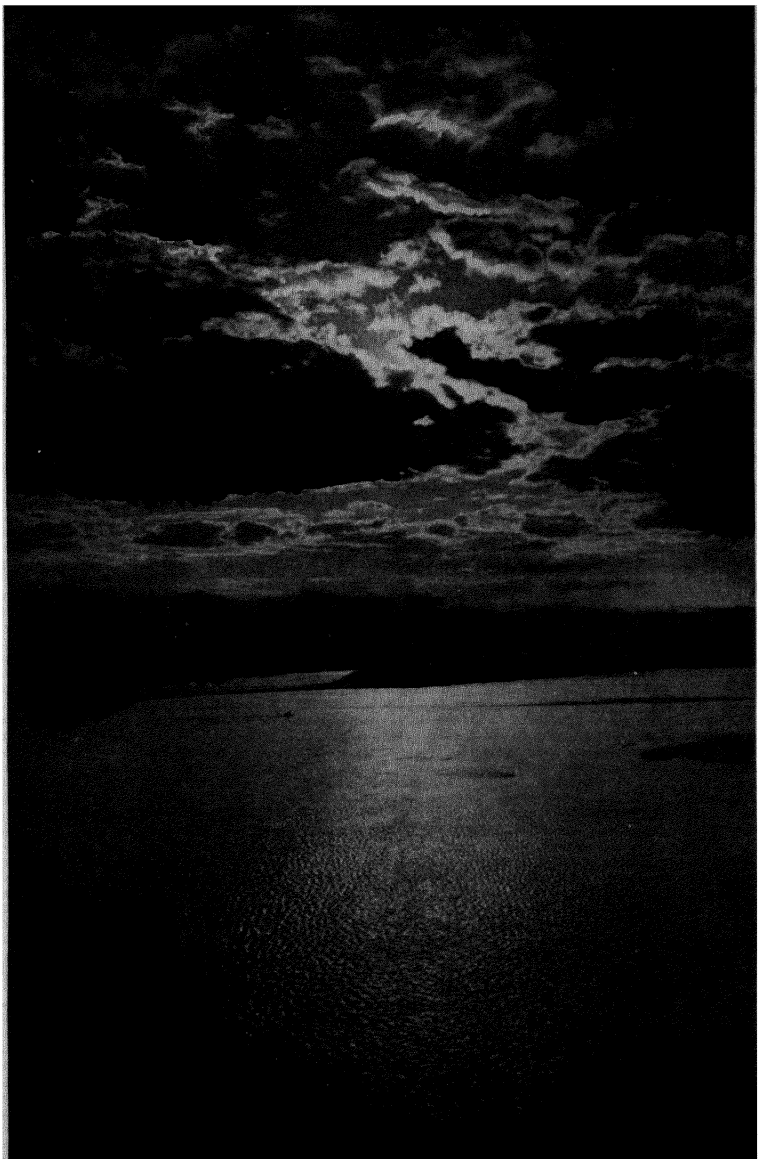
THE EARTH-BORN CLOUD

happy is to have access to paradise. The thrall of the desert sky, unutterable blue, and never one lone cloud to hint that storm might rise, is the primacy of the heavens. The fleeing wrack of clouds is the diversity of Providence. All things are in flow of happy, happy change. No two minutes are alike. "I make all things new" seems to be the legend which controls the day—some delighted angel calling "Presto!" for the fun of it; and all the clouds hoyden and laugh aloud "Presto!" nor pause to look at their own silent shadows on the grass and stream.

Or when the day is gray, when the clouds are ash heaps of wood ashes, when they are so gray that you sniff to smell the wood perfume as you look on the hearth of the sky banked with gray wood ashes, then the world folds its hands and sighs like a lonely woman of the broken heart. Some places I know such days to last for weeks. No hint of rain, only the restful sky letting the blue sleep awhile to rest its blue eyes and keep them bright. These, in the usual, are autumnal skies, though at intervals such a day will lay its quiet fingers on the pulse of summer. They are wistful as birds flying south. No shadows are cast, for all is shadow. It is the artist light; things seem as things are. Pity the landscape that knows not the quiet of ashen clouds and the immeasurable rest of the autumnal spirit of the sky. How stately do common weeds appear against this dim gray! They climb into regality. The skies are lowered. When the

heaven is blue infinity is overhead. Earth things, mountains and trees alike, are dwarfed. Then when all the heaven is thatched with gray you could by tiptoeing touch the ceiling of the sky. The trees do tiptoe. They strut a little, or even more than a little. The wayside weed feels imposing. The mullein stalk thinks it is sentinel on a windy hill. The clouds are still like boats at anchor. The heavens are taking a nap. Everything falls asleep except the clouds. When skies are radiant, then the heart cries for radiances, but when the skies are gray, one is loath to have sunlight intrude. The world is "ashen and sober," as says the grave voice of Edgar Allan Poe.

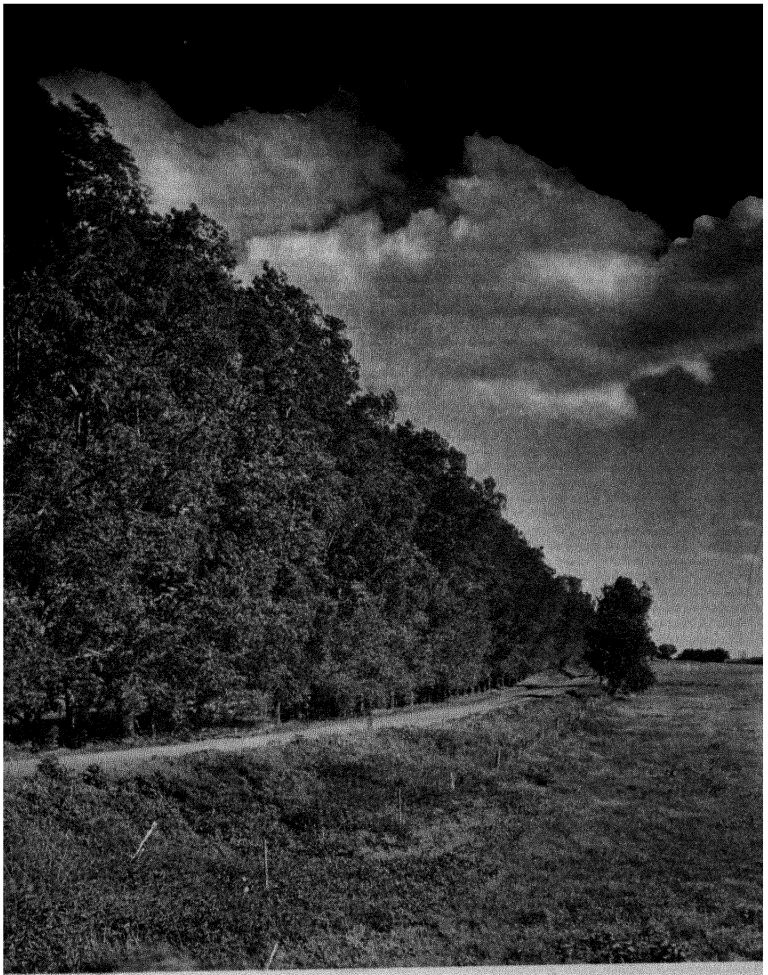
I have adverted to the artistic quality of gray clouds to heighten objects by lowering the sky, and wish to enter into that cloud-phase more in detail here, as I have not found it recognized and rejoiced in as its worth justifies. Gray is a neutral tint which brings out winter trees in the most daring and effective way possible. How I have in my pilgrimage luxuriated in this quality of cloud effect! Winter trees are specially beholden to it, although all trees are its debtor. We cannot look into the conspicuous blue of an unclouded sky and catch the full sense of a tree of summer. The intense blue of the sky does in manner dim the green of the trees, or the green of the tree invades the blue as color kinsman. Blue does not throw green out bas-relief as a tree needs. This is how in the rage of the burning blue and white of



MAJESTIC WANDERERS OF THE SKIES

a desert that the pines lose luster of black beauty. I feel them but do not discern them with my physical eyes. The fierce blue and the fiercer brightness of white light both make war on the emerald. And the sky is so high, and demotes all beneath it, and fairly sneers them down with vitriolic humor. A summer sky is scant interpreter, to say the best, for the things that grow.

For such things as are part of the stage property of the world, like mountains, rivers, seas—no matter what the light or the blue, they stand fixed in their order. I cannot dismiss a particle of the majesty of the sea because it is domed over by a sky blue as itself and exultant as itself. The sky owns the sea anyhow. What the sky colors are, the sea colors are: blue sky, blue sea; gray sky, gray sea. The sea is mighty and garrulous and peremptory and surly and sublime but lacks character. It borrows its hues. It cannot argue against the sky, though it often wars on it and tries, blinded with its own spray, to run up the long ladder of the heavens and wallows back, angry, uproarious, and defeated but to espouse catastrophe again, though all the while the sky sneers down on it as saying: "I give thee thy grays and blacks and silvers and wine drip and wine drench. Thou art my manservant whom I command, and thou art my drinking cup which I drink dry to wet the parched lips of my clouds." The seas roar but are without retort. And the seas wrangle with the ships and drown them and

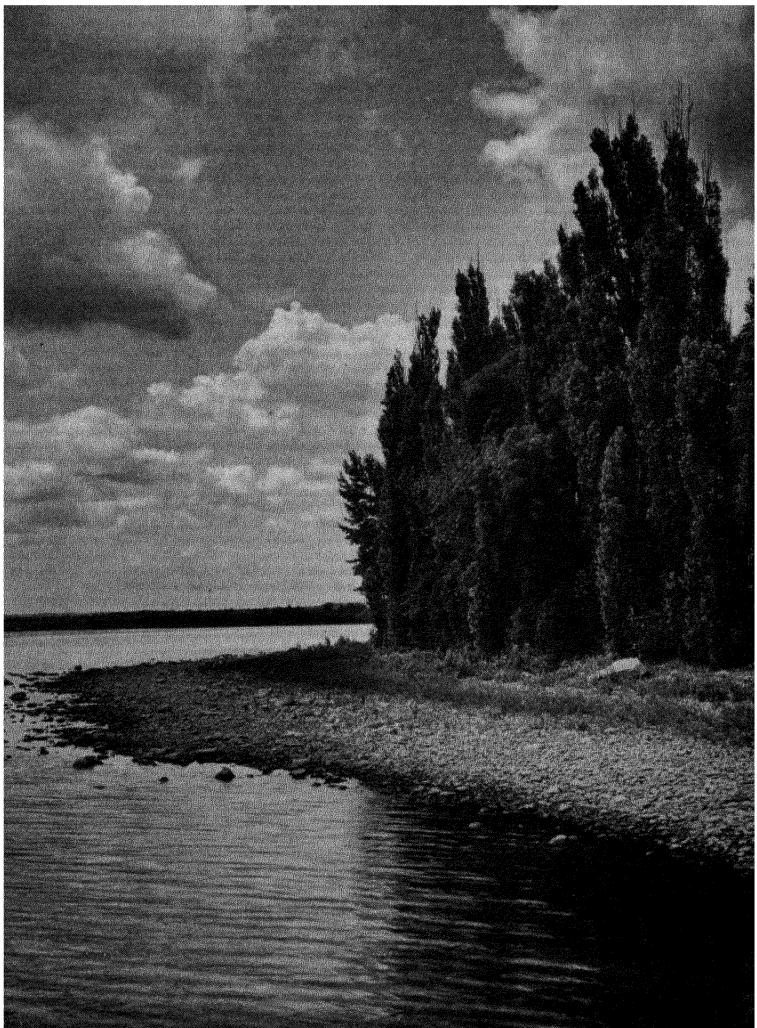


CLOUDS OF AFTERNOON

spray them with ten thousand tempests and grimly bid them make no port but the grim port of death, yet the sky smiles and the sea laughs aloud with infinitude of smiling, or the sky frowns and the sea whimpers like a starving world. So do the mountains stand great, grim fastnesses of silence and the hush of pines and audacities of avalanches. The sky cannot drown their wonder though it may abate their stature for the hour. And the rivers press on to the end of their journey at the sea, full-quested, silent, glorious, and one knows not whether the river is diminished by the sky. The river has its way under the stars, under the sun, under the blue, under the black welter, where the storm clouds mangle each other like hungry lions. The river cares for none of these things, walking in a dream. It is adventurer for the sea.

With things that grow the sky is too dictatorial and monopolistic. It demands too much for itself. It engrosses observation, so that when the clouds come, not only do growing things receive their shadow but they climb to what they are.

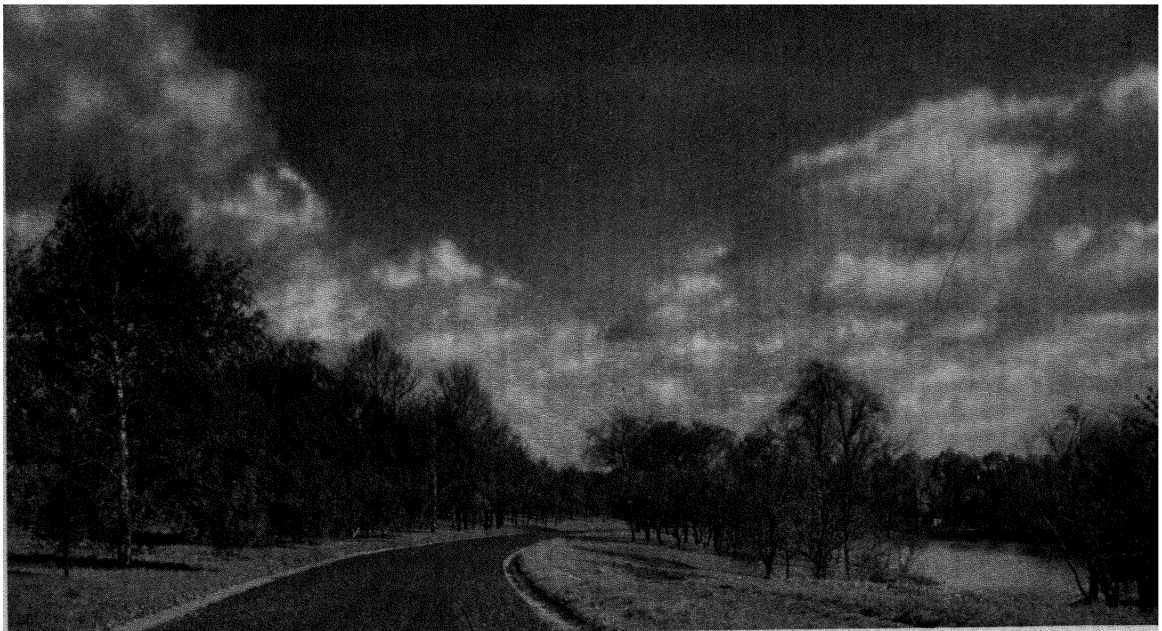
FOR many years in tens of thousands of miles of travel have I watched the effect of clouds in revealing the stature and nature of trees. In cloudy summer days the whole sense of the summer personality of a tree becomes manifest. The observer is not blinded by the light and not misled by the



THE WHISPERING WIND

empyrean distance and height and azure. The tree stands as a picture hung and framed upon a gallery wall. It intrudes on you there. It seems to feel its own dignity and stands to have itself observed, the very picture of modest yet unashamed loveliness. And if one be afoot (and as for that, everything is seen best afoot), a standstill is the speed for admiration. Motion is commotion. Birds far-flying and high-flying see little worth the seeing. We must pause to inhale the fragrance of a scene of exulting loveliness. A silhouette does not suffice. It aggravates, blurs, blends, falsifies. If one be afoot or stands under clouds, he convinces the soul how beautiful the tree is. How sturdy yet how tender, how feminine and masculine the bole and branches and swaying branches! Thus one beholds and marvels that till now he knew not the most familiar trees of his forest neighborhood. It is a new tree under the clouds.

Chiefly, however, is wintry gray the satisfying tint to bring into beauty, dignity, massiveness, and delicacy the naked trunk. The gray etches every limb and branchlet against itself. I have watched with growing wonder these wintry trees, which even afar, and more so near at hand, fail not to give account of their selfhood in minutest detail against their beloved gray sky. As I love an etching and can never tire of it, I love and never tire of these winter etchings which everybody holds in common possession for the sight of the heart when the huge oak masses its century strength



Photographed by L. R. Bostwick.

CLOUDS OF AUTUMN

for pitiless combat through days and nights of wintry tempest, and from where the roots bulge out above the ground and climbs the huge-girthed trunk, fit pilaster for the sky, and spring out as if in anger the branches with fists on every arm, and the branchlets rip the storm until the whole gray sky appears to be created for the oak to have its picture taken in; the sky is nothing; the oak is all. Then a sturdy tree trunk becomes sublime.

I know them and their names across a continent. I would adventure across a thousand miles to see many a trunk I wot of and feel myself repaid for a quiet five minutes of calm in watching his majesty spurn earth and espouse infinity. A birch tree against gray sky is a rapture. The delicate branches with the bud at every limb point is an ecstasy of etcher's art, so beautiful as to haunt a body when he has come and seen and gone. The etched white of the maidenly birch against the neutral winter sky fairly squanders loveliness; we cannot talk of it; we can only recollect it in exultancy of artistic gladness.

Under that gray sky too does a beech tree seem nonpareil. The bud, ready to hurry when the spring saps begin to flow, is pointed like a thorn. Under that sky all the drop of the beech branches, all the gray-black tint of its bark, and the cameos carven on its trunk, and its thornlike buds pointing their fingers as to say, "That way lies spring," have the effect of a discovery however often seen.



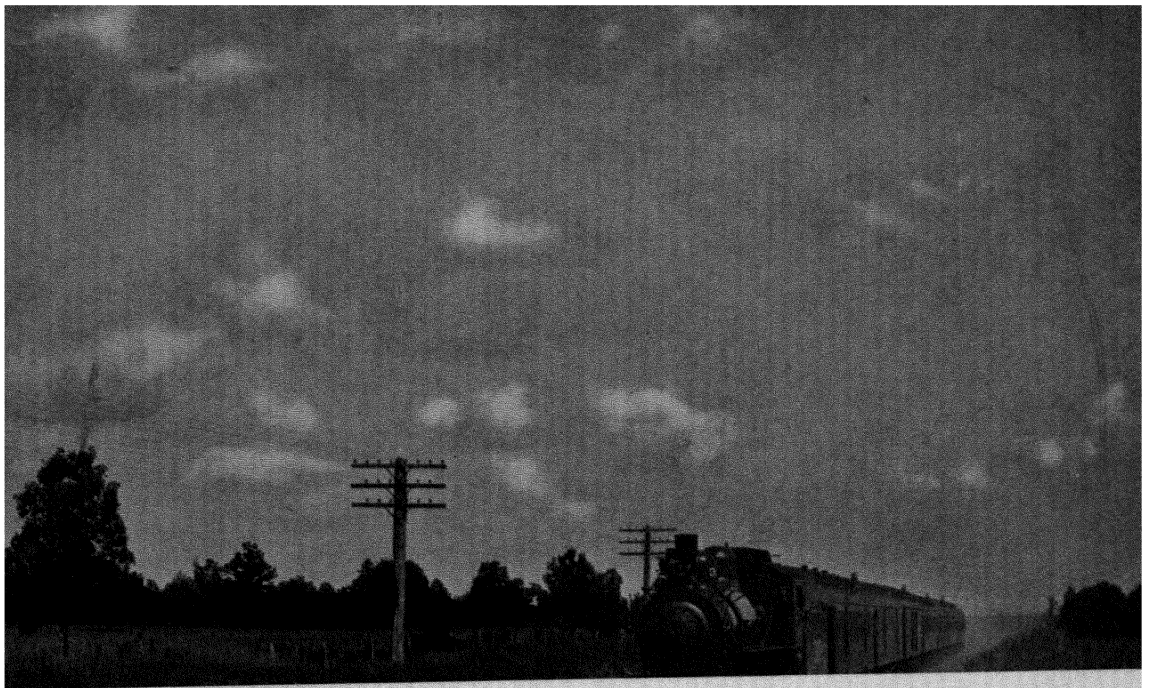
THE CLOUDS OF HARVEST

Under the same sky how notable a poplar tree stands climbed high ere a branch shoots out into the sky, but a bark of bole in particular and of branch silhouetted against the upper sky till words are too neutral-tinted to express the impression!

Or when the elm with its rhythmic branches stands out lonely against a gray sky nearing night and the delicate and multitudinous branches and twigs stand still as if to have their pictures taken, who can tell the thoughts that arise in the heart as the darkness swallows the delicate tracery up and leaves the tree like a lighted picture in a stately gallery having but a single picture on the wall?

God was chief artist when he made gray clouds for a background for his trees in his valleys and on his windy hills.

AND a fog, what can exceed its poetry? The world at a touch becomes spectral, evasive, elusive. Things are hidden as behind a mask and things not remote appear deluged in distance. Your own street becomes a mythological roadway. A fog is cloud come to the ground. What weird things mists are! They wraith the landscape. They render our habitations things to dream. The Lady of Shalott's vision of the world passing by is not so phantasmal as the things of sense seem by the dim lamp of a mist. I love then to walk about and hear the hesitant drip



CLOUDS AT MIDDAY

of the indigent leaf or twig; to feel the slow push of the fog on my face as of a resisting hand, to shoulder a cloud from my breast as I walk feeling myself master of the path I take. I will be lordly and thrust the clouds aside to let me pass. The commonest, familiar things are shrouded in mystery. You scarce know your own house. It looks at you like a stranger till you nigh pass it by to enter another body's door. "Where am I?" is the reiterant colloquy of a body with himself while he walks in the fog. Ships and cities are engulfed in the quiet smother of this apathetical cloud. The world has forgotten where we live. The locomotive slips by us in fear and the bell muffles its tone in passing. The Scripture phrasing puts on new eloquence—"baptized in the cloud." On Scotch moors, on Manx seacliff, on Sierra passes, on witless prairies, in gullies of the night, on Niagara's edge, by the Mississippi's silent search for the sea—there and a thousand other wheres have I lost me in the cloud and have been submerged by the fog till I stayed as marooned on a hushed sea, a foreigner at mine own door, an intruder on my own farm hill, a clansman of an eternized dusk, an eerie dweller in a land where all uncanny things were at my own doorstep; and my own household were witless wanderers from a land of ghosts. Phantom ships sail past and phantom figures rise and stalk like figures fresh risen from their graves. He that has not learned the thaumaturgy of the fog has been witless. To be pulled to a standstill by the wet palm of the circum-

ambient cloud, to be bidden to give some ghostly countersign or not pass by, to be cloistered in the mesh of adventurous dark while the watch insists it is near noon, is poetry, pure poetry. You can swap worlds without being put to the trouble of traveling. You have changed stars nor care to know what star you have adventured to. You are beleaguered by the hesitant as if you tramped along the sea edge in the surly dark immured by cloud. Your coat becomes beaded with rain that did not patter. You are rained on when it is not raining. The sky is petulant; and you are part of its petulancy. It is the loveliest pouting in the world. Who is so adept that he can picture the fog with his brush or take a snapshot of the mist? Plainly, the fog has frustrated us. We are baffled and laud the hand that baffled us. Shakespeare, Turner even cannot paint a fog. The fog is a presence, an experience, and a memory and hath vanished like extinguished stars.

When through the dark of fogs the sea clangs as if it climb the shore and flings its spindrift on your face and hands—all voice, all anger, and all invisible—you are beset by an invisible foe, you are at the mercy of a viewless hazard. About your eyes are the heavy bandages of an unspeakable fog, and though every sound comes gigantic voiced, you stand in blindman's land or you creep, for you dare not walk. You have no footpaths, for you are afraid of a precipice or some swift inlet of the sea. You are prisoner though no



DOUBLE CLOUDS

manacles are on your wrists save the manacles of the fog, and they suffice to make you prisoner for whom there is no hostage. Boom! boom! the waves thunder and grind and the ground quakes in wild tremors as if pain stabbed through the shore and you stood as if you were on the Land's End of the world. Walk, man, you are free. But the words are witless. You are indeed free. Ankle and wrist assert their freedom to the leaning eyes, but that is all. You stood and shall stand the prisoner of the mist. So sometimes a shore is imprisoned for days, the land lying invisible. Whether you stand on headlands or on the lean sands that rim the sea, who knows? Not you. Fate may play blind man's bluff with you and though some irate Lady Macbeth might jibe, "What? A soldier and afeard?" you would not budge. At whom should you strike? Can you stab the mist? Inhabitants wander like shadows, scared shadows, lone children of the mist while at the foot of lone cliffs clangs the never-ending anger of the sea.

And when fogs settle on the harbor and the sea, and on the shore, you stand watcher through the mists which are not impenetrable but only dimming, and the ghostly ships pass like a sail adrift, torn from the mast where once it bellied to the winds and made far voyagings. Creatures of the mist they are as ships that pass in the night. They symbolize the mystery of the sea. What know I who watch whither the pale thing goes or what its cargo or who



A Reef of Clouds

captains it? These are the sealed orders of the deep. They challenge our wonder and give no reply to our vague questionings. "Of the mist are we but of the mist are ye," is what their silence argues. You stand upon the shore stationary as a dead man peering in his death, and it is as if a dead man caught you by the hand and beckoned you whither you wist not. We are all blinded children of the mist. When the fog is on us with its gray sackcloth we are compassed about by shadows and are shadows among shadows.

I have known a deep fog lie over the ground all the night when the air was at autumnal frost. The fog did not drift; it lay still asleep. The train in which I was walked stealthily lest it should be wrecked in the cloud. A shiver was in the air, the stagnant air. The slow dawn chastened the dark. Darkness made way for the morning twilight. Then the day struggled with the cloud that clung to the ground with tenacious fingers and the dawn-twilight groped toward daylight but could not quite find its way. Slowly the fog grew tremulous like a leaf disturbed in slumber, or was it like a waking sea? The lethargy was growing ashamed. I saw a phantom train slip past and every boxcar was enameled with rime white as starlight. As each common boxcar came it went past like a block of snowy marble meant for some palace of the angels. A boxcar is not poetry but purpose. These were poetry, not purpose. Then the fog wavered a little like a hesitant dream and at length grew tenuous. The

beckoning willows huddled in the ravine, the stately cottonwood stood upright along the fields, and with their fine branches the elms stood like white etchings. All the wayside shocks of corn huddled like little houses in a village, and all the world was garmented as the angels of God in pure white as no fuller on earth could white them when without warning, with a dash like a swimmer diving into the sea for love of it, the train hurled into clear sunlight and the fields glistered and were transfigured. The fog was like a tale that is told or a remembered sleep, and the world stood clean as if God had but just now set it aside from creating it. The thaumaturgy of the fog!

The fog is the sphinx which crouches not beside the tired Nile stream but anywhere across the world, and whether it invades the land or sea, the stridency of hurry slows its pace, the eager ships stay their mad rage of speed and mutely ask the sphinx fog its secret, receiving no reply. Only the icebergs blindly keep on their courses and leave behind them pale wakes of foam and wet hands of shipwreck on the bewildered sea. No fog tells any secrets nor gives alms of comfort save the alms of death. Hush, heart! and the befogged sea slowly swallows up its dead.

A BOOK OF CLOUDS

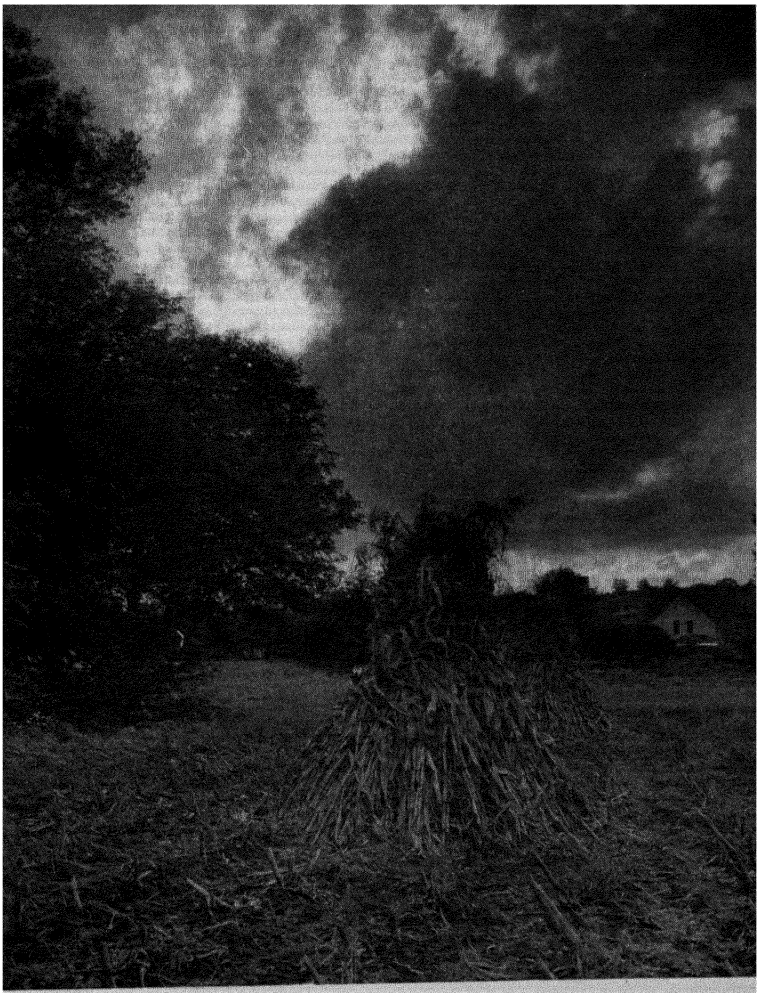
TO slowly climb through a cloud along a mountain side is an adventure of a lifetime. Not raining but smoking like a fire half put out by a rain, it puffs in your face, then clings like a thing in need. Below and around, the streams brawl and the pines are at peace with one another, only making no melody of the sea moaning at the bar, while the cloud hugs the high rocks, caresses the headlands of the peaks, subdues the angularity of them, and smooths out the wrinkles in the mountain's aged looks, whispers to the daylight not to shine in the eyes of the sleeping pines but let twilight stay. How far below does the mountain root? How far above does the mountain crest? Guess. The mountain climb and crag and glory are hushed to rest in the mantle of the clouds.

The antithesis of sky color and cloud color is a thing to make a spirit sing. The haunting blue! When God arranged his color scheme for this cosmos we call the earth, blue was the tint of tints to beleaguer all chrome-tints and make them effectual and effective. Everything looks well in the blue sky. The green of the grass, the mud scarlet of the poppy, the haunting yellow of cowslip and dandelion and buttercup, of sunflower and goldenrod, the blue of violet or forget-me-not and wildlark spur and spiderwort, the white of the sun-centered daisy and the peaceful waterlily and the neverquiet wind flower and the old gold of the overripe wheat and the multitudinous tints of the



River Clouds

orchids, all love the blue sky and live under its sweet canopy and are full content. How a sea marsh's dull copper solitude befits the blue sea beyond and the blue sky overhead! How the rich green-yellow grass of the river marsh greenery graces the ground under the leaning blue as if it were smiling happily back at it. And into this waste of imperishable blue the clouds make their incursions. They throw out their banners and expand their sails, white sails against the sea-blue sky. As a white sail on the sea is the final word the poetry of landscape has to utter, so these sails innumerable of the sky, white, exultant, restless, graceful forever, and strange, and sailing we know not where —white-sailed crafts upon the infinite ocean of the blue, sweet sky. As no poet can watch the filling sails passing the harbor bar to make journey on the wide and far-going sea without a shadow of pathos putting its hand upon his heart, so perpetual argosies of the clouds do fill the soul with unutterable sadness and haunting aching sometimes like a man's heart for a beloved. I should say that clouds are as sad as leaf-fall and sunset and dusk. We shall not see them again. We wist not whither they haste nor on what strange length of voyage nor at what ports afar they shall touch. They haunt our memories as a footfall in a deserted house. Clouds are close kin to tears. No matter how joyously they fly across the azure they are such pilgrims of the infinite that they have a heart-ache hidden in their vagrant madness. They minister



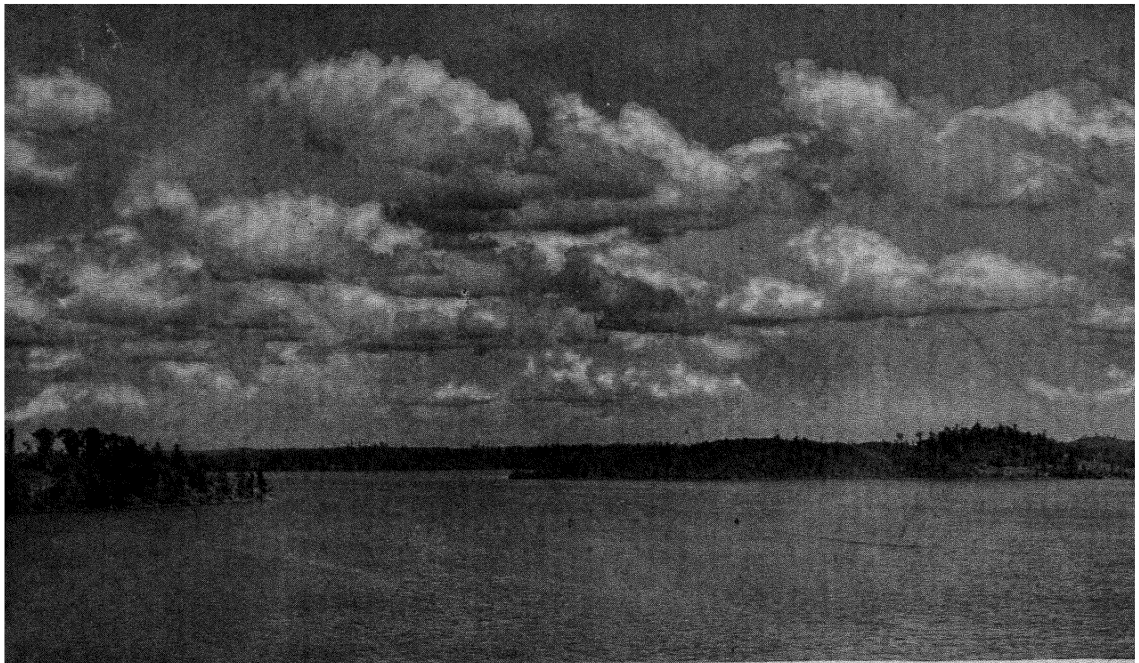
Photographed by L. R. Bostwick.

AT SUMMER'S CLOSE

to sorrow, they are adepts in tears, not only when they bless the ground with rain but when they bless the heart with their fluff of sails.

When clouds lie at anchor, as they so often love to do, in a summer sky with wind asleep and memories of voyaging forgot, they haunt us as fisher fleets anchored in the roadstead. They are weary; and weariness is begot of toil; and what shore or stream or drift of sea or swift toss of mighty ocean waves across their plunging decks these have encountered we cannot know, but these thoughts are passing to and fro somewhere in our memory as we are looking at the anchored boats and not less on looking on anchored clouds. They may have sailed very far and may be very weary and are stopping for anchorage for a long while; or, as the tide at night when the world is asleep, they may slip out for the waiting voyage from which they shall return no more. As the migrant birds, so are these migrant clouds, majestic wanderers of the sky. As a spirit passes out into the long dark, into the deathless silent save for the drip of tears, so these depart. It was a saying of one of Shakespeare's folk that he never could listen to sweet music without sadness. Certainly it is so touching the clouds for such as know them for what they are, the spirits of the skies.

The skies afford such vast-galleried spaces for the artistry of the heavens. Bourdillon tells of "the little clouds all gold which suddenly illume the gates of the lost day." But they are not little clouds. All of



Photographed by J. N. Barnes.

CLOUDS OF SUMMER NOON

them are vasty. The sky is so roomy that if things give signal of their presence, they are vast; for the trivial is swallowed up in the sky. A skylark sings not far into the morning blue till he is submerged like a pebble thrown by a strong hand, and the eagle flies not far aloft until he becomes a portion of the vast overhead. Miniature painting has no handiwork in the skies. Those who paint there must have Kipling's strength to use a brush of comet's hair. Vast spaces are for Alps, and strange Sierras are in those ample galleries, so stately and grand that all earth regions which ever climb ambitious for the dawn are substellar and little things. I have seen huger Himalayas than ever flung parapets of snowpeaks round half the sky climb snowy ranges in the high heavens where no fleet foot ever runs nor any Alpine climber ever comes with adventures and intrepid alpinestock. There in the skies these cloud summits climb sublime with never a terminal morain nor any glacier grinding toward the valley, nor ever appareled by invading spring. I, kinsman of the prairie though not mountain born, have in spirit scaled these unscalable Alps and rested my sweaty soul under the cool respite of these heights embattled in everlasting snows. All that earth knows grows smaller than the pine upon a distant hill beside these colossi of the skies.



MIGRANT CLOUDS

A BOOK OF CLOUDS

NOBODY who loves clouds ever tires of them. They lure one as they did Turner. They are as varied as a woman's moods and as whimsical as Charles Lamb. They have no ditto marks in their typo's case. A study of Turnerian cloud effects and a lifetime observation of clouds equip a body to know the infinite variety of those heavenly strangers. It is unbelievable. They woo our wonder if we watch them. Summer clouds, spring clouds, autumn clouds, winter clouds they are; for one cloud differeth from another cloud in glory, even as it differs in form. What there is in the season to command a subtle veering in cloud personality and impression is a part of the cloud mystery. In a day—nay, more, in an hour of a day—I have sometimes seen the whole plan of the clouds change from summer to autumn and the summer cloud appear no more. It has vanished utterly like a migrant bird. So too have I seen the sudden transit of cloud form from autumnal to wintry, though that change is not so observable nor customary as the other. Then when the sudden burly winter is bidden good-by as registered in the spring cloud aspect it is as thrilling as the first blue-bird song. To watch the sweet stealthiness of spring in the greening of hidden places along a bank or on a sheltered brook open to the south is no more an ecstasy than scanning the meadows of the heavens to watch where their dogtooth violets grow. Both-wheres spring shifts the scenes with never a rustle of the curtains.

Tennyson's "Early Spring" is to my mind the most satisfying spring poem ever written. It catches and holds fast the transitory loveliness of the witchery called spring as if a body could hold the pathetic wonder of a sunset though it burned the hand that held it.

"Once more the Heavenly Power
Makes all things new,
And domes the red-plowed hills
With loving blue;
The blackbirds have their wills,
The throstles too.

"Opens a door in Heaven;
From skies of glass
A Jacob's ladder falls
On greening grass,
And o'er the mountain-walls
Young angels pass.

"Before them fleets the shower,
And burst the buds,
And shine the level lands,
And flash the floods;
The stars are from their hands
Flung through the woods.

"The woods with living airs
How softly fanned,
Light airs from where the deep
All down the sand,
Is breathing in his sleep,
Heard by the land.

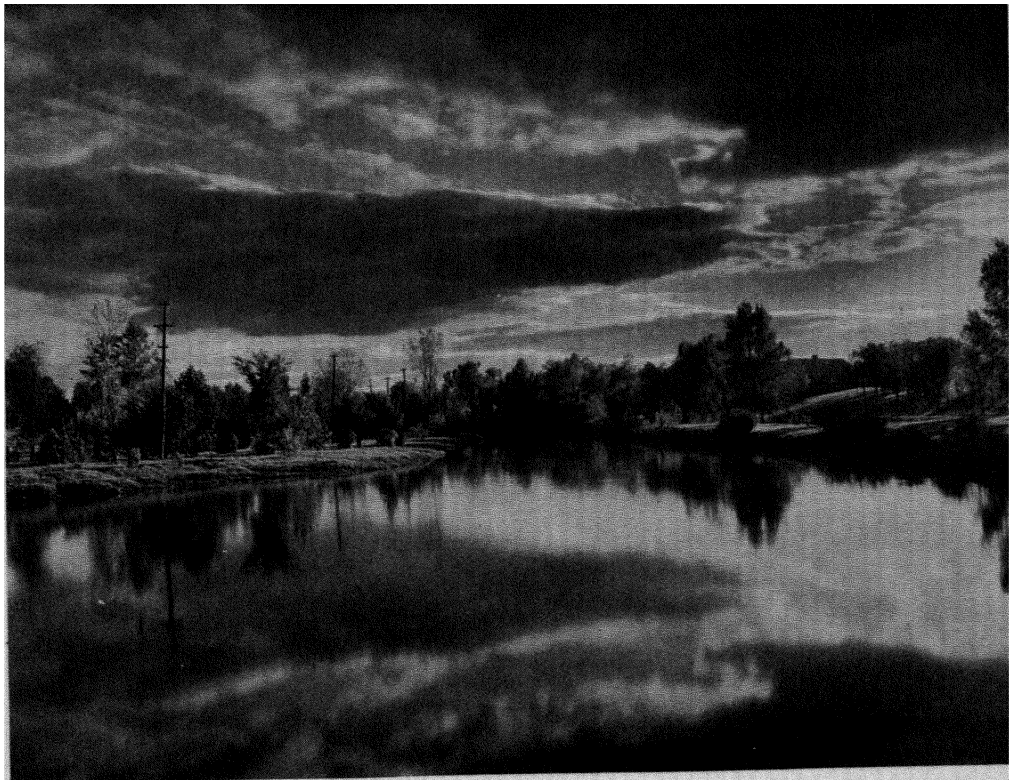
"O follow, leaping blood,
The season's lure!
O heart, look down and up,
Serene, secure,
Warm as the crocus cup,
Like snow-drops, pure!

"Past, Future glimpse and fade
Through some slight spell,
Some gleam from yonder vale,
Some far blue fell,
And sympathies, how frail,
In sound and smell!

"Till at thy chuckled note,
Thou twinkling bird,
The fairy fancies range,
And, lightly stirred,
Ring little bells of change
From word to word.

"For now the Heavenly Power
Makes all things new,
And thaws the cold, and fills
The flower with dew;
The blackbirds have their wills,
The poets too."

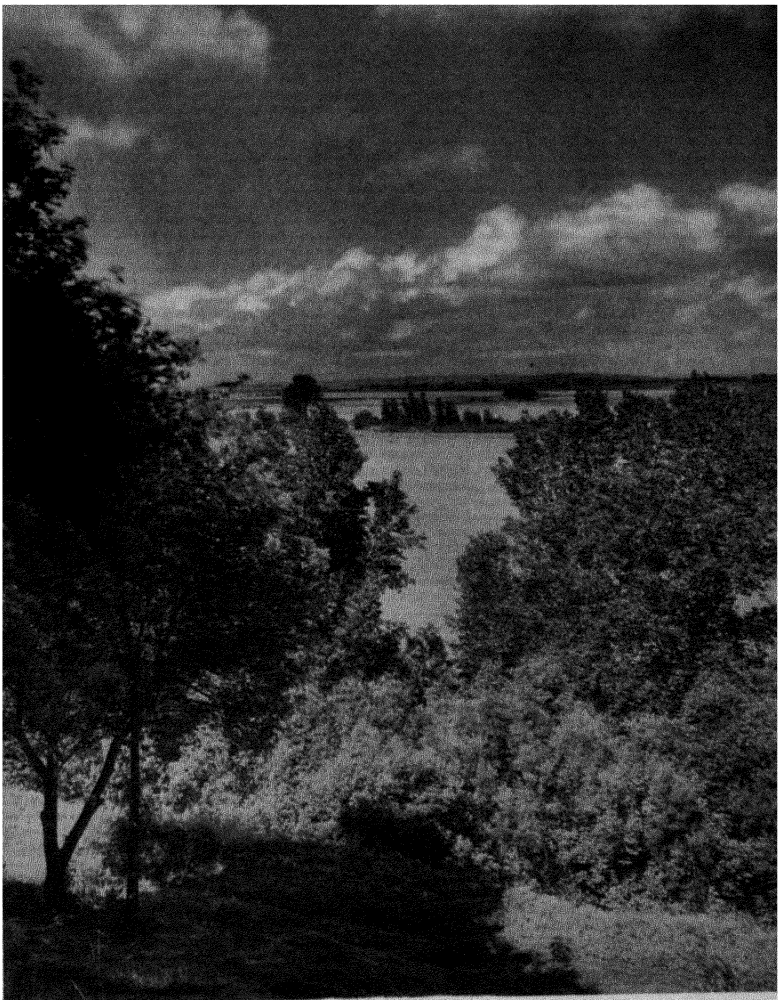
To see this spring advent by watching both the ground and the sky with equal glance is poetry grown music, but not the 'cello's note, rather the voice of a flute.



TWO FIRMAMENTS

A BOOK OF CLOUDS

CLOUDS will not be familiar. We may not say, "I have seen your face before." Each cloud is new as a first frog-note in the marsh. If one were a superficial observer, clouds and clouds could be roughly divided into cirrus, cumulus, and nimbus, though such divisions are very crude. There are cirri and cirri, cumuli and cumuli. The coastlines of the cumulus is a new geography as of ever-arriving frontiers. Its continents and archipelagoes are ever reshaping their borders like a star in the making. The mountains of this terrene landscape admit of accurate measurement. Once their stature is determined a thousand years tramp over them bootlessly. They stand impervious to the touch of years. The trivial diminution through the lapse of years and fret of tempests and the teeth of hungry winters is inconspicuous. The centuries must mass them into a gigantic company or ever they shall shrivel the mountains and reshape their contour. The mountain ranges of the clouds defy orientation and sneer at the surveyor's skill. They cast no skylines twice the same nor climb into the azure in identical configuration. They contrive no fortress with lofty bastion and remote battlements which shall ever again rear their lofty fronts. Once seen, they vanished to be seen no more—that is their biography.



August Color

A BOOK OF CLOUDS

ONCE, sometimes twice, seldom ever thrice in the year, have I observed a mackerel sky. When it comes is a soul's holiday. I stop all I do and watch. It is an advent as if one saw a flock of angry eagles climbing toward the sun. Why it should be so we know not, nor why it should not be oftener we know not. Our "knownots" touching the clouds are our only sure possessions. We seem not to know much about them; they will not let us be familiar. Clouds are not set for scientific philosophizing. They refuse to be handled. They are come unaware as angels. We have little need to know their secret but absolute need to mark their advent and form and transit and evanescence. In a slipshod way mackerel skies are all alike. In a poet way they are never alike. Those filmy scales group in an ever-varying, ever-enticing im-methodicality. They respect no precedents and have no recollection. They are without ancestry. They are, nor ever were nor ever will come more. I wish I could picture the wrack of flake-loveliness of the mackerel sky. No fish smell is on that heavenly rhapsody. I have marked them stretch like a Milky Way let down near the earth and so bridge the heaven like stepping-stones across a summer wandering, babbling water brook, the stones so close each to each that a baby-step could make easy way across. This mackerel cloud is not panting to be gone. The clouds are so high that the world-breath plucks not at their hands or garments nor tugs at their



ICEBERG CLOUDS

amazing wings. In truth they seem to have folded their wings tight across their breast so no wandering wind could pluck at them. They achieve a quiet beyond any clouds I recollect to have wondered at. They are not listless, nor weary, but satisfied. Sometimes I have noted half the heavens vibrant under their breathing quiet, a quiet as sure to last but as sure to vanish, a breathing like the breathing of a quiet sea net, mindful of tempests past or future but as dreaming of the storm that was or of the storm that is to be. My fisher ancestry minded much the mackerel skies as a weather sign, but I, their degenerate scion, make nothing whatsoever of this meteorological portent, and all of their authentic loveliness. Sometimes I have seen this importunate wistfulness on a summer day when all their parts were of silver shields hung as on a castle wall waiting an angel's left arm to wear them across an angel's heart; sometimes over a wide water where no land etched a shadow on any further shore, sometimes a half continent inland and in a semiwinter when the clouds hung like listless sails on a drowned sea and no winds could be dreamed which could belly these slumberous sails. The sails were asleep: no anchor dropped from any prow, nor any music dripped from buoyant keel. They drowsed, yet in a little space they were no more. While I watched them the wind had caught the sails, drifted them across the heavens and far away. I knew not how they evaded me, for they made my pulse beat like drums. I would not have them go nor

would I have them stay. It is not my fleet, and how should I command it? Captained of God these sailing craft come, captained of God they go, nor whence nor whither know I but that they voyaged across my sky and fell asleep for a moment in the open vastness of my sky before my eyes—this is my felicity.

OTHER clouds are like banners, heavenly banners. They appear insubstantial like spirit. A whisper could scatter them. They float from invisible headlands. They do not wave: they are flung out but not as blown out by the winds with a motion like a quickened water, but afloat as held out by no wind but, rather, by dead hands. They would be spectral were they nearer. The wind sustains these aerial banners so that not to the pennant tip is any hint of quivering. They make rest palpable and visible and render the "island-valley of Avilion" other than a fantasy. They calm all the volcanic angers in our souls. We seem not to be able to affright their fearless quiet. Who are we to be at fret and in perturbation when these who view earth's angered oceans and eruptive peaks espouse a tempestless calm? Peace seems not far from any one of us when yonder unvagrant, unsullied, unhasting watchers of the ground hush voice and heart so that the babes can sleep with gentle smiling on their faces.

"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (namely, disquiet them).



A Bunch of Wood Ashes

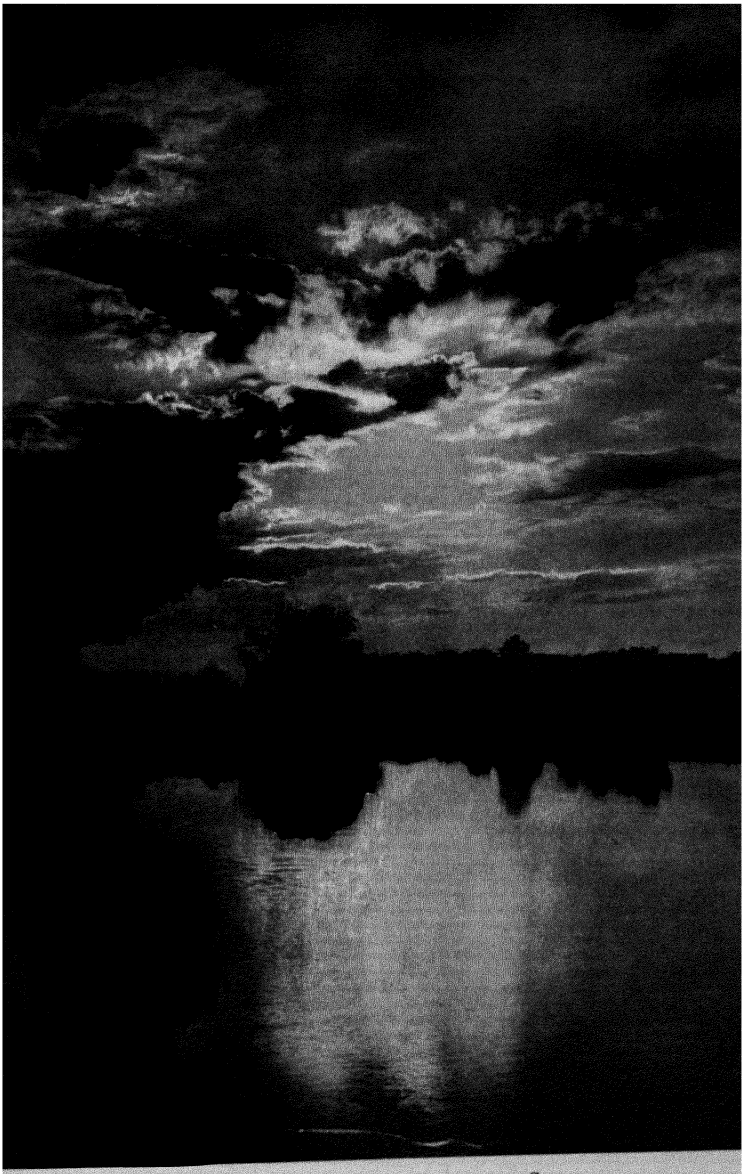
I read that some great wheres. It hath the seeming of those peace tokens in the heavens.

We have no call to fret. Care has no authorization to brawl so tumultuously. There is a quiet sea somewhere and a sky where the lust of storm winds is forgot. How sanctifying this calm of clouds! How cheap earth's hurly-burly is in presence of this beneficent peace! Their quiet is the calm of God.

"But when the surges rise
And rest delays to come"—

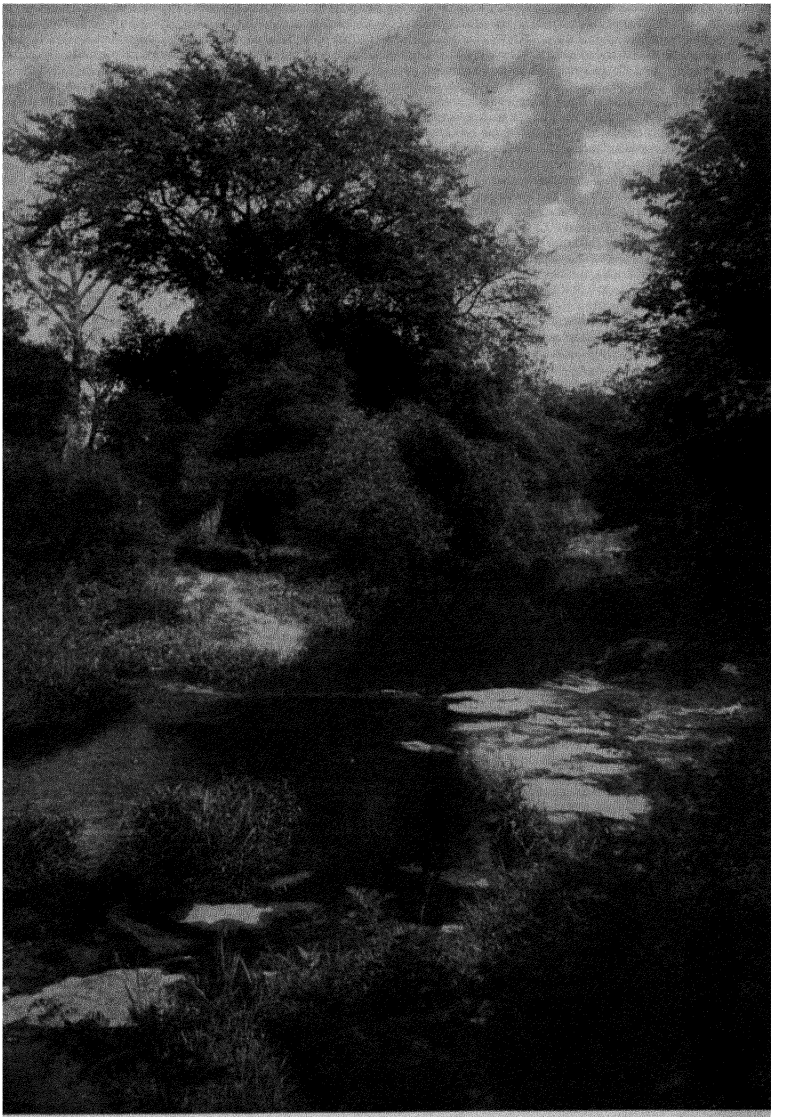
then the clouds are magical and magnificent and brutal. I think all battle must have learned its plan from the storm clouds. They are so relevant, so direct, so ferocious, so magnificent of onset, so schooled to know not defeat, so ever renewed in their broken onset, so unassailable of despair when they sow the sky with tempests that our eyes never can weary of the storm aspect of the heavens.

It is good to give heed to a summer cloud gathering along the sky line, slowly gathering bulk, bleak as winter midnight, slow as a sluggard host, a stupendous fatigue seeming to wrap its mass in lethargy, yet it creeps like a black tide that knows no recession, only a blind, reasonless pertinacity of purpose which refuses to abate its progress. It is as fascinating to watch that black, brutal advance as to watch the stealthy approach of a hungry lion on a soldier fast asleep. No haste! The black, bubbleless tide, whose advance is scarcely visible only it has no recession, and marked by



When Evening Gilds the Skies

where it was an hour since we know it, though asleep, is on the march. It is somnambulist and, like a blind beggar by a wall, creeps forward. The line stays on sky level. You might lay a huge spirit level along its upper edge and the bubble would halt at the center of the tube. There is no pulse beat. The sea quivers even when it lieth quiet; not so this climbing tide. Not a bubble rises, no wave stirs in its dream. No lightning dazzles at its edge nor thrusts at its breast. The lightning is dead; so are the thunders. The cloud has forgotten its tempest, and its lips are dumb. It climbs! It banks the west. It replaces the heavenly blue. It is some blind giant who hates the sky he may not behold and soots it over with the soot that boils from the slow chimneys of the utter dark. The wind on the ground has forgotten to blow. The leaves are still at noon. The clothes refuse to flutter on the line. The ringlets on the baby's forehead as it lies asleep in the sun are motionless. While the mother sings about the house those ringlets feel no fingerings of the breeze. The sun shines wildly bright in a sky wildly blue. Radiancy is gone mad with its own luster. The cloud climbs! It is grown to a mountain height, only there are no peaks, just a vast "Bad Lands" in the sky, a huge phalanx of strange height and moody majesty. Hush! the baby frets and gives a sudden cry. What wakes the babe? Has the mother forgot her song? Nay, but across the baby's face, shined on by the lavish sun, a sudden shadow slips. The cloud has climbed to



A Passing Cloud

the noon. It has eclipsed the sun. The sleeping babe misses the sunlight and wakes. The moon goes suddenly dark and a streak of dust is seen along a distant road. A whirling pool of dust eddies in the street and catches torn bits of paper and wisps of hay fallen from a passing perfumed hayload and dashes them about in senseless petulancy. A zigzag of lightning grips the black apparelment of the skies at a dozen points, yet the cloak is not frayed. A vast voice issues from the clouds, in deafening roar. Then the calm disappears; the silence is forgot; the riot is begun. There is anguish in the skies. The slow and unimpulsive yet persistent tide has in a moment grown wild. The level line of cloud suddenly shoots into innumerable promontories that writhe like serpents. The whole half-sky still blue is covered in an instant. The wind awakes; the tempest rejoices; the thunder booms; the lightnings blear; swift sword slits of the brutal zigzag lightning are everywhere; sheet lightning fills the whole sky with blaze like an amphitheater in conflagration. There is no mercy visible. The wild birds hush and hasten home. Not a rain drop wets a leaf. The winds drive the black wrack with violence like waves dashing against a bleak, blind shore. Then a patine of blue floats out into the sky like a heavenly promise, blue as a Siberian amethyst. While we watch its heavenly azure it is blotted out. Then it is as if mountain ranges were at war to the death. Huge ranges lift black ridges, and then range and range

charge and clash as if to wreck the world. Then a raindrop; then a huge drop spits on the dusty road or smears the window pane with a vicious splash; then the lightning riots and blinds the woman at her work, and the farmer hastening with the plow horses from the field; and then a torrent of rain that drowns the field makes every road a rivulet, and the cattle huddle in the pastures, and the city streets are washed for nothing; and then a blue sky line, and the west whence the tempest came is dismantled of cloud and the black green cloud ranges change to high white peaks and the sky overhead is blue, and the runnel at the foot of the garden babbles like a host of rooks, and the boys wade barefoot in the muddy rivers in the streets, and the birds let on it never rained, and "The sky far up is blue." And the melody and tragedy of the storm are surceased, though the memory of it is a thing to recall in heaven.

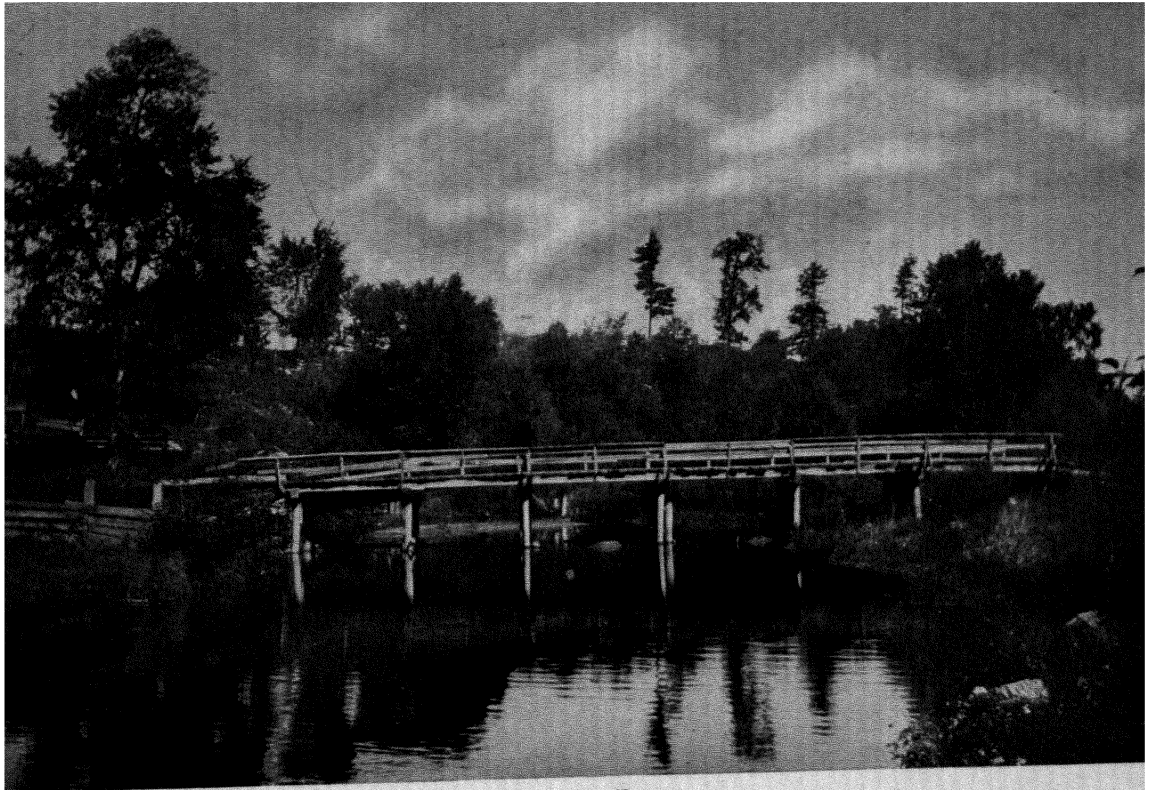
THE mountains of the skies have ever possessed my spirit hauntingly. How many are the times, in crossing a desert, I have looked not only with inquisitive eyes but with what I will venture to call schooled eyes as touching the aspects of both mountains and clouds, yet could not for the life of me determine whether I saw mountain range or cloud. I have watched them so at times for hours. Far off they clomb, shaded at the base, white at the sides, and at rest with the calm of the mountains, and to myself I would



THE SKY OF DREAMS

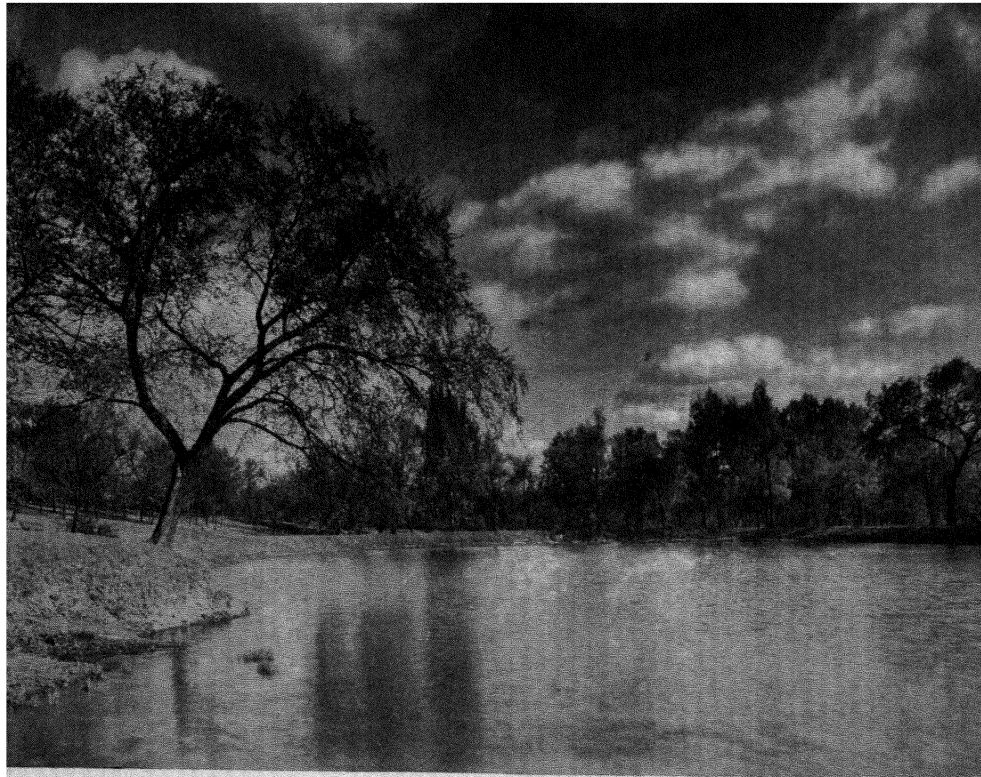
say, "Now it is a mountain"; then, "Now it is a cloud"; then, "No, mountain"; afterward, "For shame, eyes; it is palpably cloud"—when sometimes it was mountain and sometimes it was cloud: I pity a cloudless landscape if any there be, for cloudlessness robs the landscape of its mountain eloquence. However level the landscape is, where the clouds are, sudden Sierras are apt to rise and stately Andes and hardy Alps.

Once in journeying in Kansas, I was going across prairies on a wintry, windy, shivery day when the road was long and to many might have proven burdensome; but to me, prairie-born and ancestored by the sea and the mountains, it proved a day of mountain wonder and majesty. Winter does not tend to Alpine landscapes in the clouds, for its clouds seldom take a configuration of the everlasting hills. Clouds in winter prefer to be tenuous and to spread like a gray cloak. They wish to break up. They are erratically connected. They seldom form cloud faces or mountain acclivities as the summer clouds love to do and play at doing. Such is the spirit of the summer sky from which it refuses to be interrupted. As we drove, the wind was in the north and blew damp as if snow were in prospect. We headed north. The buggy was open. The prairies lifted and fell like a trough and curl of a leisurely sea wave. We had no hurry but were jogging along leisurely, when as I fronted the sky (as I do every day while I waken), I saw a thing I had not seen nor have since seen. It was



THE FOOT BRIDGE

a series of parallel mountain ranges. I could look up between range and range and climb their valleys with my eyes. There was no inhabitant. Plainly it was frontier land. No man had climbed those mountains on this far frontier. No smoke rose blue from any habitation. No field with shocks of corn lay along the valleys, nor any cattle browsed on winter pastures, nor any dog barked across those lonesome solitudes and listened to his own monologue. It was a "desert and solitary place," and the mountain ranges rose, one by one, equal magnitudes, nor was there any sun. This day knew no sun from morn till night. It had neither sunrise nor sunset. The mountain ranges ran parallel to each other, as I have said, and were alternate mountain range and mountain ranges, invisible to each other. The far end of the receding mountain range climbed the higher as if approaching the divide of a continent and the roof of its world. Then came the unique matter, this: that the sunless ranges threw shadows. Each valley had its mountain shadow as plainly as I had ever seen in mountain valley on a sunny day. The deep trenches of the mountain were not dug sharply as with a spear but undulated like a sea at the storm, but the shadow of each range (there were no crags) fell deliberately on its valley. I had seen thousands of cloud regions before and I have seen thousands since, but that effect have I not seen save then. Once beheld, it needs no fellow. I saw it, and it springs its gray ranges along my mind's landscape now and ever.

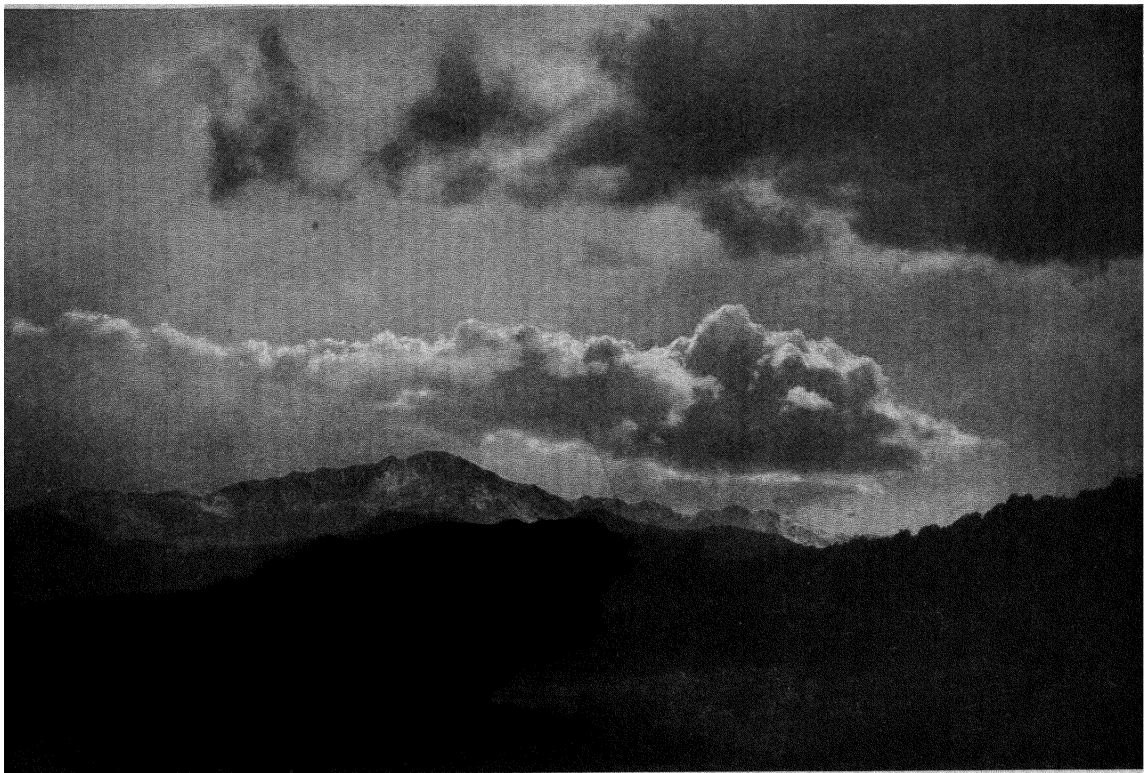


When Summer Dreams

In summer days, betimes, the whole sky is become an archipelago of Carrara beauty. Mainly these are wind clouds; and they drift and drift and never stay, though sometimes I have seen them at rest, and very beautiful they are at rest. Blue sea with islands everywhere, and in the blue sea of the skies the white marble islands float like snow upon radiant water. On some the shadow falls as from the height of a mountain, and no two of the archipelagoes are alike. With that measureless differentiation wherewith the Great Maker has variegated his universe, these aerial islands never duplicate themselves, so that a wonder drenches one's spirit as he watches the sunny configuration of these shifting island shapelinesses where God repeats not himself. In him is no flagged energy, no striving after effects. His mountain peak past mountain peak, and sheltered valley where the water courses run, and though I have haunted them much and loved them as a star its light, yet never two peaks nor two valleys nor two days have I seen alike. So with the cloud islands on a sea of amethyst, you gaze on them far away upon their ample sea while the islands ever multiply till all the purple bays of islanded beauty of the earth fade away like vanishing dewdrops.

Usually this seeing visions in the clouds is set down to imagination. It is not. Imagination feigns things. In the clouds is no mood of makebelieve. Things are there. Who looks beholds.

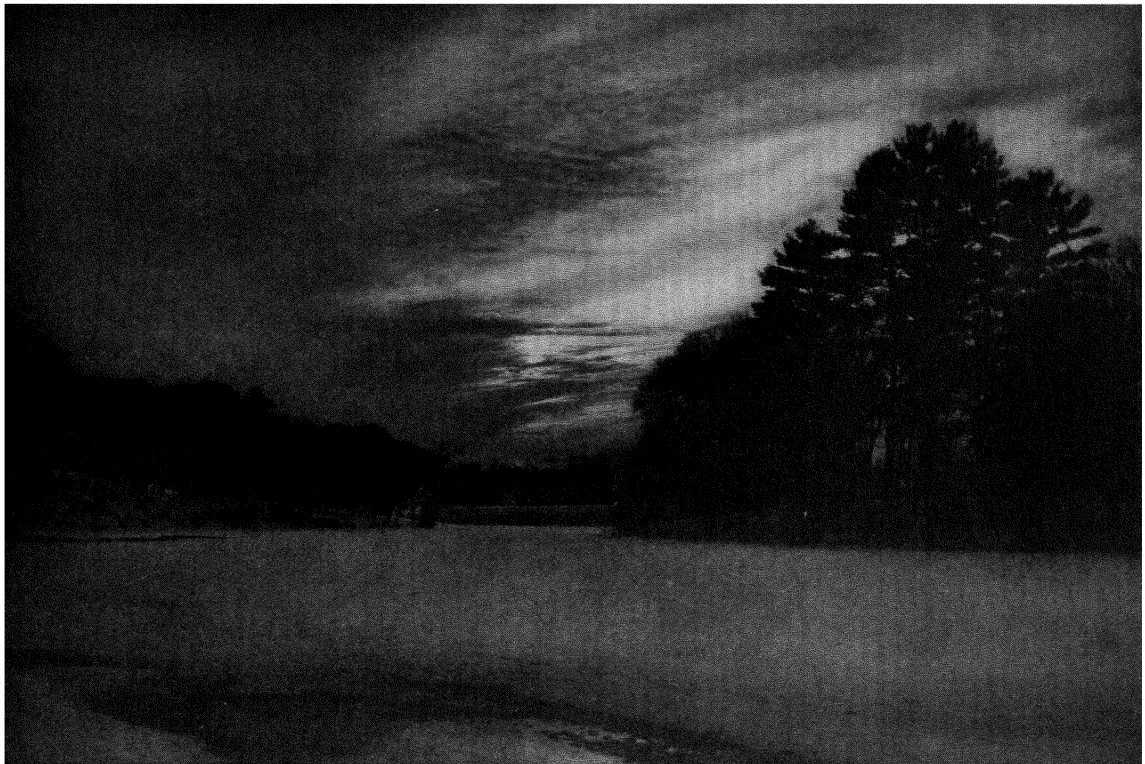
Summer is the cloud-mountain landscape season of



THE MOUNTAIN'S CROWN

the year. Then the white cumulus clouds love to build mountain ranges and aspiring peaks which never any climber scales and craggy promontories where clouds make ineffable summits where nothing wastes nor dies. How high they climb and fair! I who have seen Hood and Tacoma and such white precipitous presences am well aware that what in summer skies is done with snowy clouds in their exuberance of restless motion hath bidden these turreted mountain majesties hush their boasting and forget their preeminence and learn meekness in the presence of their masters.

As a lad how have I rested in panting summer heats, scorched by hot winds that never were quiet, gazer that I was on the cloudland mountain where I drank the rushing waters that sprang from the drifts of snow in ravines above the shadow and the psalm of pines! Some days, in the sky for hours rose pinnacles and domes of glistering white beyond tarnishment of earth-dust and all reach of harvest; and I, sweaty and weary, rested in this cooling comfort. They climb too high for climbing, therefore can the spirit rest at their far bases nor fret to scale their mighty acclivities. They repress sweaty effort: they express majestic poise and calm and hope and balm. They lure the spirit to the cool, far, heavenly heights. They give spirit levitation on untried pinions. There they lie "nigh to God and loved of loftiest stars," as brave Lowell sang There they stand, those mountains of the Lord; and

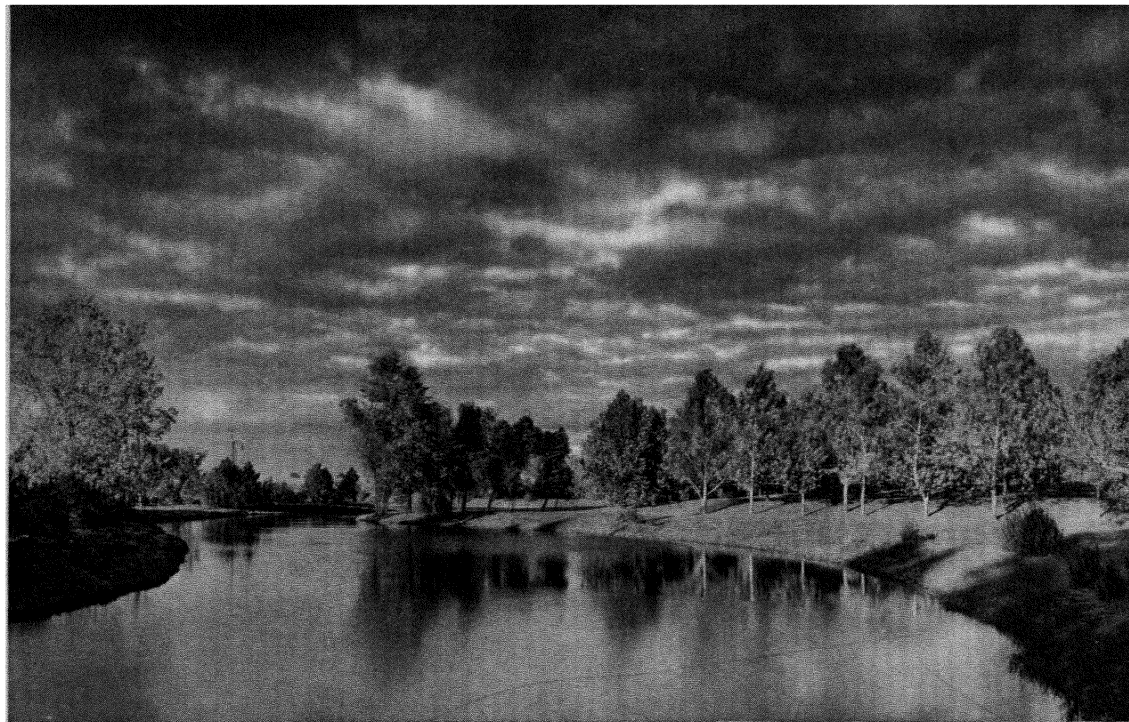


A Summer Sunset Cloud

there I shall stand and above them on more majestic altitudes some radiant summer day when I am quit of weariness and care and entered on the everlasting calm of everlasting life.

WINTER clouds differ from summer clouds in shape, texture, radiancy, and in an indescribable more which all these happy years of observing them I have been trying to compel the secret of. It ever eludes me. These clouds appear to be woven on a different loom and are cheaper fabrics withal, and their sunsets less often invite the splendors. They are draperies easily torn and apparently incapable of forming other than curtain effects. They refuse to be flocculent. They are not competent for that restless variety which is the necessity and mystery of clouds of summer and of spring. A winter sky usually is garmented in these gauze-woven clouds.

The other evening I witnessed a curious winter cloud effect. The day was snow-clad though thawing a trifle. In the south the vapors were winging their way as clouds that might herald the spring; and climbing from horizon to zenith were two types of clouds: one heavy, dark, compact, unillumined anywhere, then a seam of blue like a Norwegian fiord (only the blue of December rather than of June) but deep-cut, abrupt, uncrossable—a gorge as of deep sea water without a single ice pan floating there—an open polar sea, and south of the crevasse an aspiring flock of un-



THE HUSH OF THE DAY

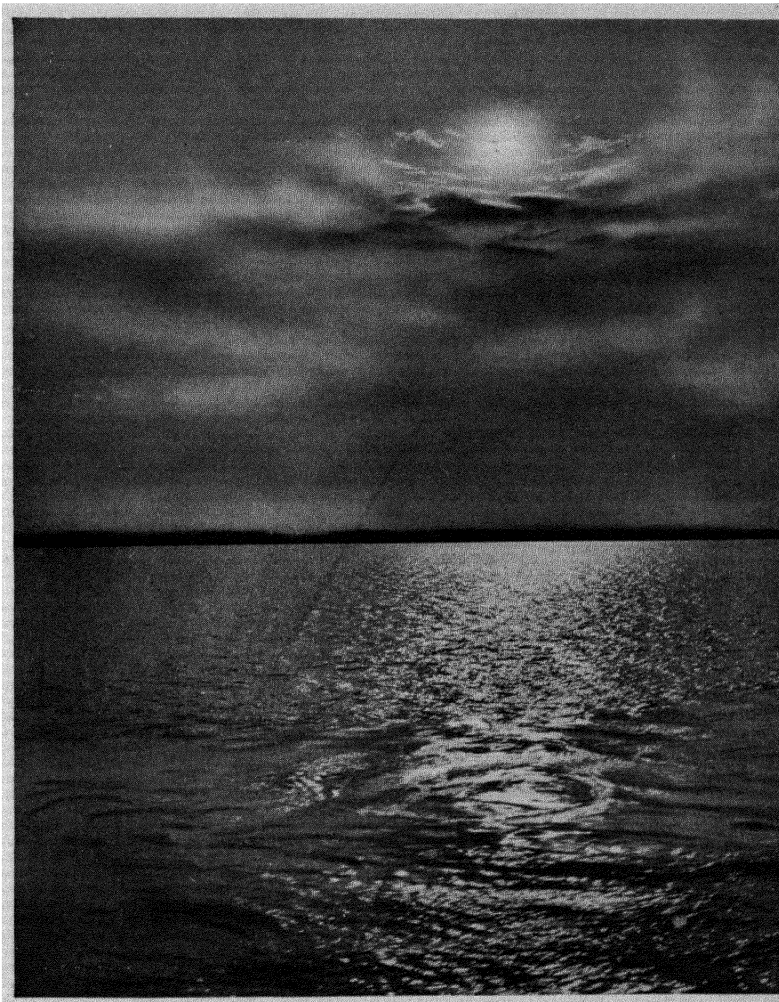
related clouds. Sky behind them was almost to be seen through them but not quite, as if a whole sea were full of floating ice pans such as haunt the Labrador, but so thin that the sea water below them shined through them. Each cloud sort came against the edge of the blue fiord, looked down and across but adventured not. Not one reaching wing of either cloud stretched across the abysm. They were as unneighborly neighbors, dwelling in earth beside a gentle stream but refusing to notice one another or be neighborly. They were inhostile. I was not privileged to behold how long a time these divided heavens continued, but that a new thing had been bannered in my skies I knew and was glad. I see them now, crowding to the edge of the chasm but not having the inclination or the daring to cross, and I wonder how wide the fissure and how deep this far-running fiord of the sky. Will clouds never have done with their artistries and unexpectednesses? Must the watcher of the clouds stand forever on the watchtower?

A CLOUD lies along the summer heavens and usually has been seen by me at its best along the southern skies, what we term the thunder-head. It is a conspicuous cloud lying like a gigantic iceberg without kin and sometimes lying for hours practically stationary in the skies. In it is an infinitude of quietude without a shiver or hinted anguish, and appears to be



CLOUDS OF SUMMER NIGHT

slowly, majestically pouring out along its lofty and imperial sides a volcano of snow, streams of snowy lava, the hesitant though sure boiling out of marble from which a million Parthenons might be quarried and not create a fissure in the celestial quarry. How I have watched this slow eruptive tide bury its vineyards with sullen arctic certainty and ruthlessness as Vesuvius has so often done in its cruel history! When the convolutions enlarge a snow shadow arises and tarries as if the mountain were frowning—the hasteless speed of a volcano named in no geography. It lies not in any artistry to reproduce this cloud. The outline might be caught, but the abundant folds of white in that gigantic quiet which seems repose but is ungustful motion, those unbleak bleaknesses, that resident supermajesty where a sky is lorded over by one snowy glorious acclivity—no artist can fetch that sublimity from heaven to earth. It is a sky resident and refuses to emigrate from its spacious landscape to our diminutive dooryards—just one white, serene, silent passenger on a great waste of blue. I have watched it for hours. In the usual these do not tarry for long, nor so long, though sometimes I have seen one such rapture stay a whole summer afternoon, as if it lifted its bulk from a shore invisible, and all we saw was the blue sea which rimmed that hid continent and the mountain which jutted up into the everlasting azure. Once it was a compact, unfractured mass, mobile in a slow mobility which would seem immobility unless one

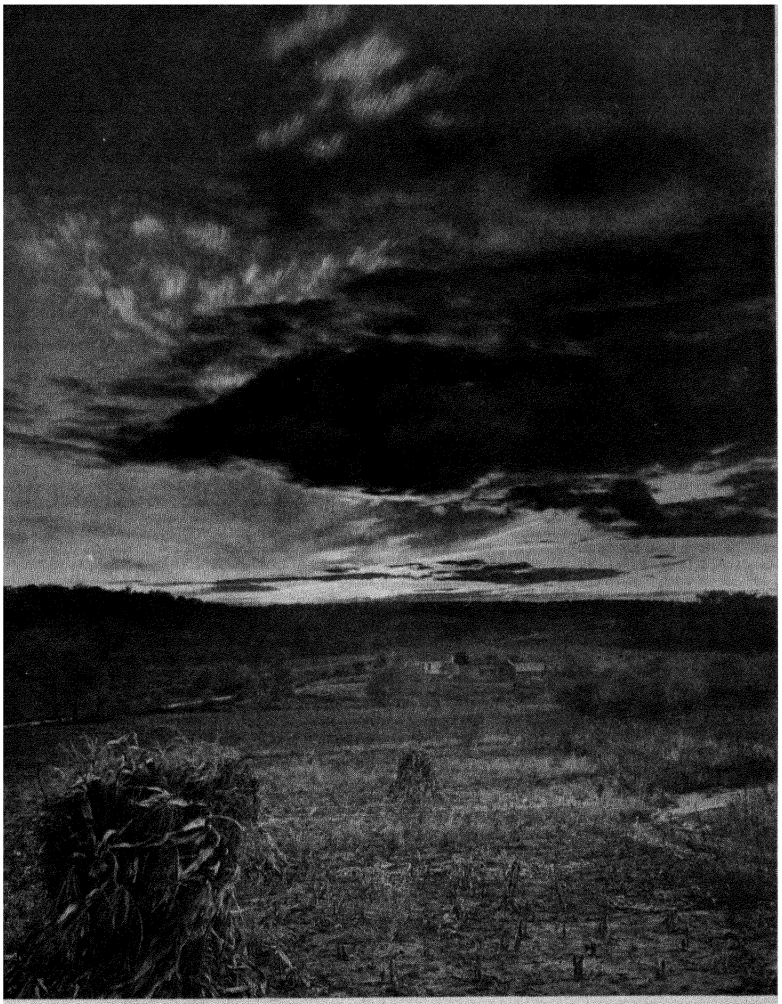


At Eventide It Shall Be Light

watched it for a time; then only could he trace the slowly onreaching lava flow which deposited fresh marble from which the angels might quarry pillars for the palace of their King.

All summer storm clouds are of this ilk, and when all the huge ring of the sky is crowded with them, every precipice in fluctuation, where, as you look at one for only a glance, another has changed its boundaries, and peaks shoot up like suddenly erected barriers, and headlands beetle, and crags aspire, and icy promontories rise whence avalanches for some wintry sea are broken, and then a wide valley opens down which some slow ice river flows, and before your eyes an iceberg breaks and splashes into a silent sea and floats away, an island of magic, shivering show which no summer frets, nor down whose sides any rivulet tinkers.

There is a picture on which I always look with heart-hurt silence. It is an arctic sea with its dim, undallying tempests, blue-green waters, wicked as the grave, no ice coast anywhere visible, but on a berg dwindled to such an island that a polar bear upon it fills all its available quarters; and there is the bear, white as the berg, with glowing, wide-open, scared eyes, peering into what it knows not, with volcanic wakefulness in which are forebodings which seem human; and between her paws a bear youngling lies fast asleep. This picture is a character sketch of the ruthless, unconquerable arctic tragedy. And on some aerial cloud-bergs I feel such tragedies may be en-



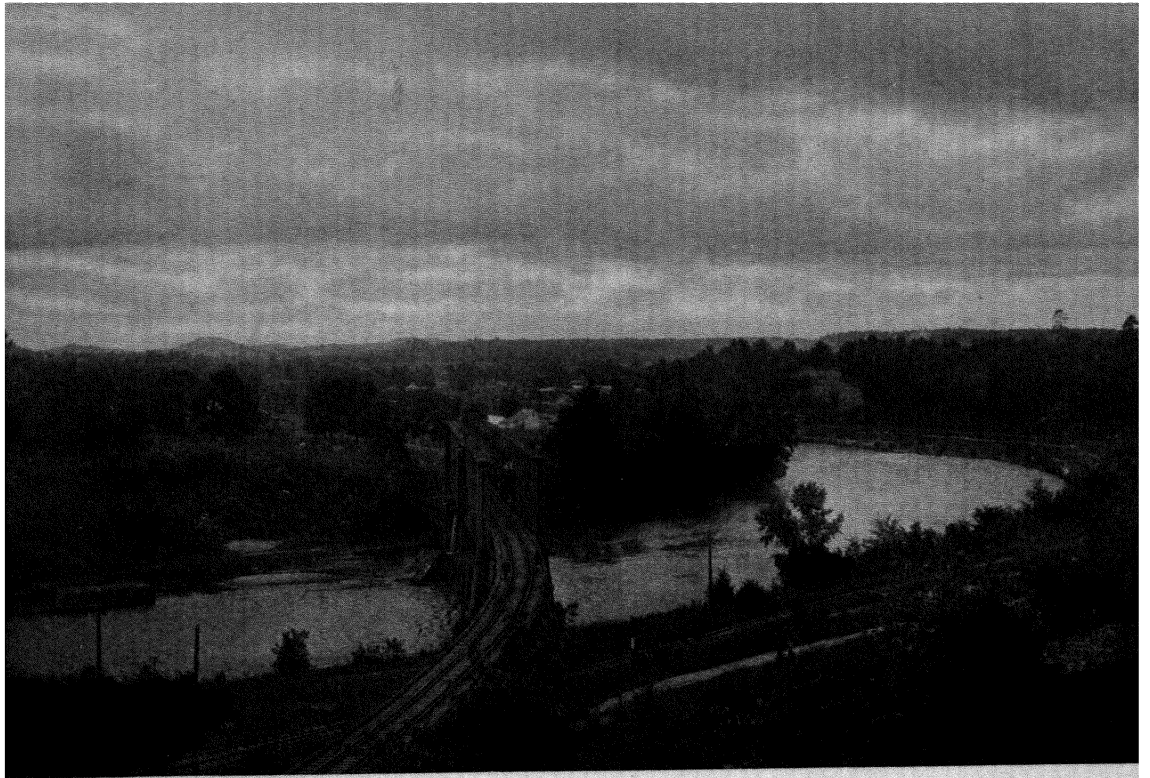
SUNSET GLORY

acted, I so far away I cannot see the frightened, boding quest, while the whole rhapsody voyaging seems far enough from any tragedy.

Some glorious days when these mountain fortresses of Sierras and Andes stand guard around all the sky it is as if I stood in some raptured valley shut in of everlasting peace. It minds me of Lake Tahoe, where on one side spring the snowy pinnacles, on another side the gloomed courageous summits clouded with moaning pines, another, a bleak climb of denuded rocks, and on the last a sheer precipice which only an eagle could scale, with the blue of the lake chaliced in the extinguished crater of a wrathful volcano. Whereas my sky landscape is girt with the grandeur of these peaks and the pine hollows in tremendous hills of a fairer Tahoe in the heavens and roomier than on the ground.

When Robert Browning in that poem of the climb of mind, "A Grammarian's Funeral" splutters out from the lips of one whose shoulders bore the dead scholar to his mountain place:

"Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews.
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man here?



OVERCAST

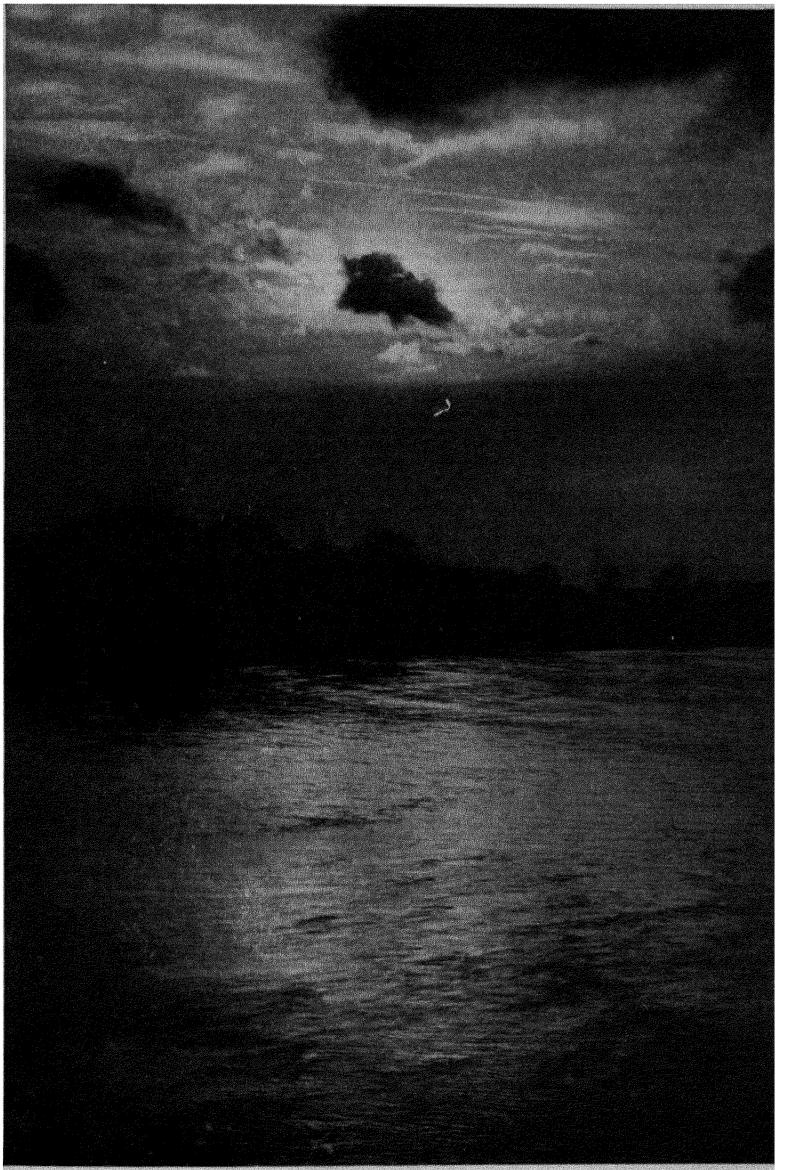
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!"

This is simply an adequate description of this mountain climb in the high dome of the heavens. "High-fliers" they truly are. They invade the altitudes. They love not our ground where the dust gathers and the harvests ripen in the sweat of the sun. They are the skylarks of the clouds. I wish it might be permitted to hear their lyric. Shakespeare opines there is not

". . . the smallest orb which thou beholdest
But doth not in its motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eye cherubins;
.
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

So why should not the clouds be minstrels? A thin glass full of water can be made to give a tone as sweet as lyric angels use in heavenly songs. Then why not a tear of a wandering cloud? "But whilst this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly" shut us "in, we cannot hear it."

Doubtless that is our deficiency—"this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly" shut us "in." That is our disease, from which we suffer many ailments. This muddy vesture is our cross. We have bleared eyes



An Island in the Sky

and deaf ears and dull and tingling nerves and poor, unstudious sensibilities. A little loosing of this muddy vesture of decay might readily make us effulgent spirits. I see it. This vesture traduces us to ourselves, makes us poor crassitudes betimes who were meant for free spirits of the open sky.

AND those far-flung banners of the topmost heavens, those clouds that spurn the ground to sanctify the sky, how heavenly they are. Who will find fit phrase to make their loveliness apparent? They mind us ever of the far-off and far-up, and that we are by them to content us in the yonder and not here. Nothing fleshly is on them. They are a perpetuated "Midsummer Night's Dream." They are leisurely Ariels who abide not the mandates of any Prospero. For what doings have they with tempests? No alarum rouses them from quietude. Winds scarcely blow; or, if they do, they have no melody. "The Tempest" is no stage where these sprites could be actors. Their drama would be "The Tempestless." I feel my pulse hush and cool when far on high these ministers of stormless skies and dismantled tempests smile and smile like some sweet, wan face on which all eagerness has died, but where eternal hope whispers eternal sunshine.

But withal—if a man may say "withal" touching the clouds. That word is too scopeful. The clouds

refuse to be enumerated or catalogued or even hinted to of confines. They have the unbeleaguered spaces of the sky for their demesne. Yet withal, the loveliest loveliness of the clouds I should reckon to be their color. They are extravagant colorists like Turner, like Titian. You cannot exaggerate their splendor—nay, you cannot approximate their splendor. To such as watch the clouds there is an art gallery at home which should make all other galleries modest and quiet speaking.

It is the clouds which let the rainbows loose. The rainbows come when storms are on and when sun is at his morning or his night, whereas the clouds need not the presence of the storm to command their variegated splendors. All the day the clouds are gray or snowy-white or onyx-black, and only at morning or at night do they put on their radiant garments and apparel them like the people of eternity told of in the book of Revelation. I can but feel that the poet who wrote that book has been a dweller among the clouds. Where other could he have learned those radiant dyes wherewith he garments his celestials? His angel clothed with the sun is gorgeously vestured, and He who was garmented in a "vesture dipped in blood" was clothed in some summer evening cloud our own eyes have seen.

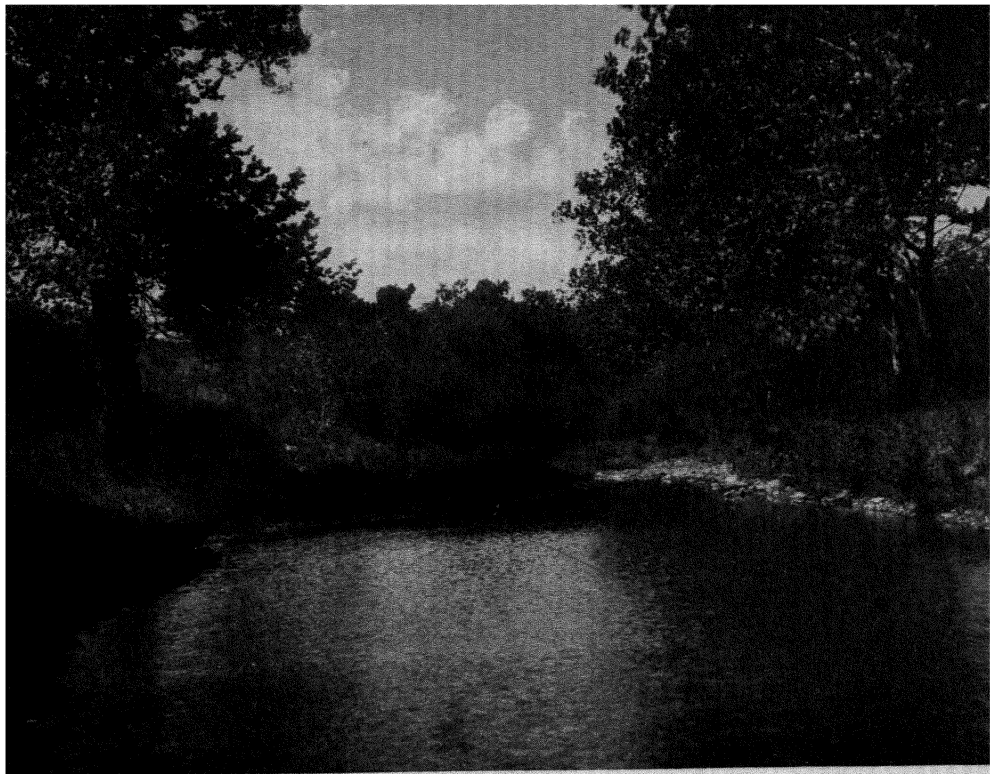
The common understanding is that sunset on the sea is a gorgeous pageant not equaled on the land. This conception is a misconception. The sea seldom opens his west to an exhilarant sunset. The reason is not far



AN APRIL SKY

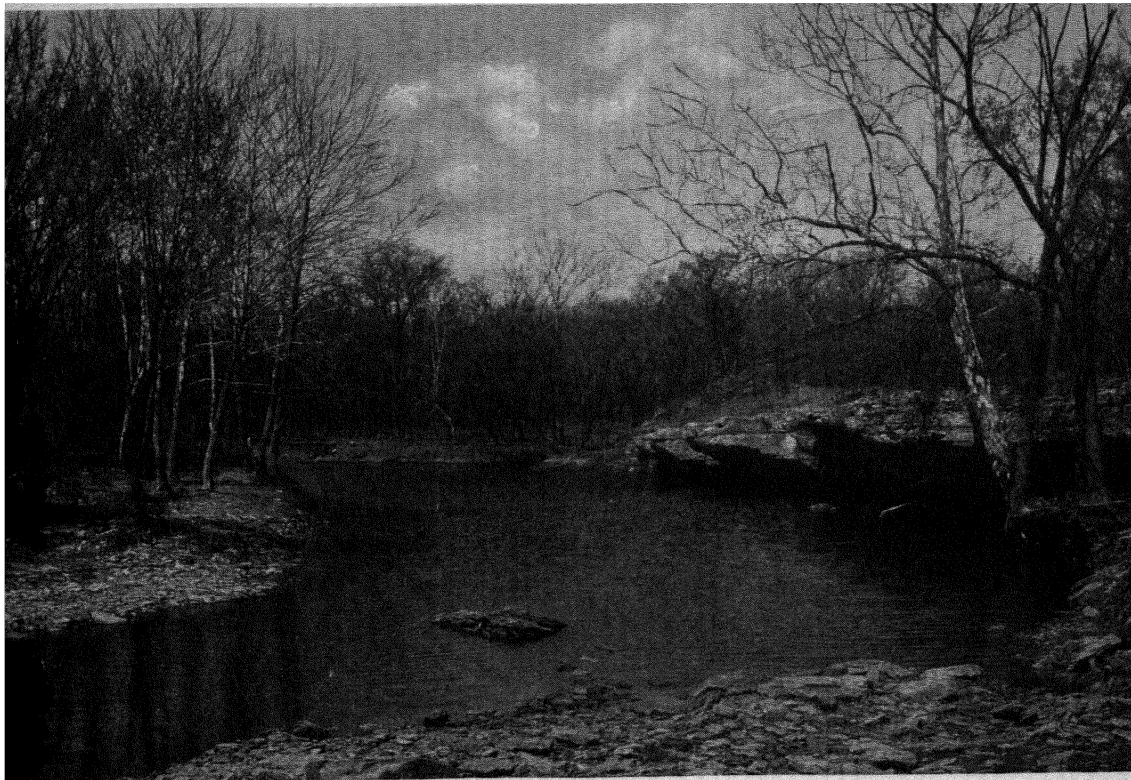
to seek. Sunsets are made glorious by dust in the sky and on the dustless prairies of the sea is not the pigment for amazing sea sunsets. To be sure, when the clouds crowd the gates of the lost day even on the sea, a sunset glory bathes the soul. The afterglow on water is the artist of most ocean evening splendors as it is upon any wide water. Nor are mountain sunsets most magnificent and for the same reason. Scarcely any dust invades the high azure where the mountains pitch their tents. In prairie countries and desert stretches where the wind has far sweep and constant play, there it is sunsets bankrupt their splendors. Dust is sown through all that sky when the cloudy evenings gird themselves with glory, and there is a rapture which is like a multitude at holiday and song. All the width of the west is drenched in crimson dyes as if these dyes were spilled all over with wine. When clouds are in the skies of morning and of evening then it is that glory grows spendthrift. Then vocabularies become mere vaporings. God needs to be around to talk of what himself has done.

A MORNING in early spring when meadow larks were spilling their rich notes into the prairie sky and the robin red-breast was blowing bubbles of music from the treetop into the air, but before the trees had any notion of putting on the shining green through which the sunlight flashes as through



CLOUDS IN DIM DISTANCE

films of emerald, though the rushes were rimming mud ponds with a bordering color in vivid contrast to the subdued tints the yet wintry world was wearing—on such a morning I witnessed this scene. I was on a train whose goings followed the stately windings of a great river. Out of the night, which was dark and starless, the river slowly came as if it had been sleeping and was slowly rubbing its eyes awake. The dark night and the dark river were friends of old. A river under cover of the night slipping swiftly past hamlet and landing and rowboat tugging intermittently at its muddy anchor rope, past cities with abundant lights reflected weirdly in the muddy waters of the swirling stream, down along muddy banks and past long tongues of sand which night and day hearken to the goings of the winds and answer to them for a little space, on down where the forests crush forward from the bluff through the river bottom to the edge of the river, and even lean wistfully over as longing to go with the stream whose going is forever and which has no taste for tarrying; the hidden river under that night canopy moving so silently that not even a sentinel could hear it unless keener of ear than most; eddying and dallying for a fraction of a moment and no longer, as if the night shadows and silence lured it and it must go by stealth on its far journey like a slave feverish for escape and hushed with fear—the wide and wistful river slipping past all fields and cities and homesteads where the watchdog barks at night, though not at the



THE CLOUDED STREAM

mystical river, whose goings are too steeped in poetry to awaken the hound from his half-dreaming of the hunt and the capture; the river, the brave river, the eventful river, the dreamful river, the river of the ten thousand thousand yesterdays and the ten thousand thousand to-morrows, never weary, ever wistfully feeling for the sea and crowding through all the dark toward its wished-for home of the ocean. All through the night starless and void, all through the night star-strewn and sweet, all through the night wind-swept and stern, all through the night moonlit and bright, all through the night a-slumber like the under seas, the river eagers on. Silent as star-goings, and sweet as star-goings too, the river pilgrims toward its sea. Its oceanlust is as resistless as ocean tides and strong as ocean winds.

This river separated itself from the dark of the land and of the sky, slowly, as if uncertain of its own mind, and then pushed sternly on, one wide, black, waking water black as dregs of ink. Swirls on the river bubble up as if some huge hidden bubble had crushed past all opposition to the surface to catch one more morning look at the sky and bid one more homesick farewell to this region of the stream. The sullen night was wading out into a sullen morning. A sullen river was sulking on past sullen windings of muddy shore, careless but strong. No joy was in the meeting of the river and the morn. They seemed not to glance at each other. Both angered, one on, one up, but indif-

ferent to each other as angry lovers. When suddenly through a tear in the clouds the whole cast of clouds took fire. The lines of clouds zigzagged like iron twisted in a fire and wrinkled into unkept horizontal strata but all molten with fierce heats and were withal very splendrous. You were looking into the glow of a furnace which was melting the rind of the world. The glare was a metallic heat which fairly burned the eyeballs as my eyes have been burned in looking into a pudler's furnace. Earth has no fierce tints like these. And no single dye could drench this entire cloud as it is drenched.

But I was writing of the river? And have I stumbled past the river to the sky? No, good friend, I am still within my theme. Of the river wrote I and of the river write I. I have not digressed. I am on the train and chasing along the banks of the wide morning river, only the sky has emptied its pot of boiling dyes and emptied them into the river. The waters are on fire. A river of lava is seething on. I fairly feel the scorch of its furnace surface. The splendor is ineffable. At a river turn the sullen blackness of the stream pushes boisterous shoulder against the fiery splendor of the lava-flow, giving fierce antithesis. I look to see the murky waters hiss, and lift into snow-white mist as these antagonistic elements meet; but on the black, unsmiling waters crush, and on the fiery splendor hastens. Here is antithesis which had made Macaulay laugh outright. It is very wonderful. Oh

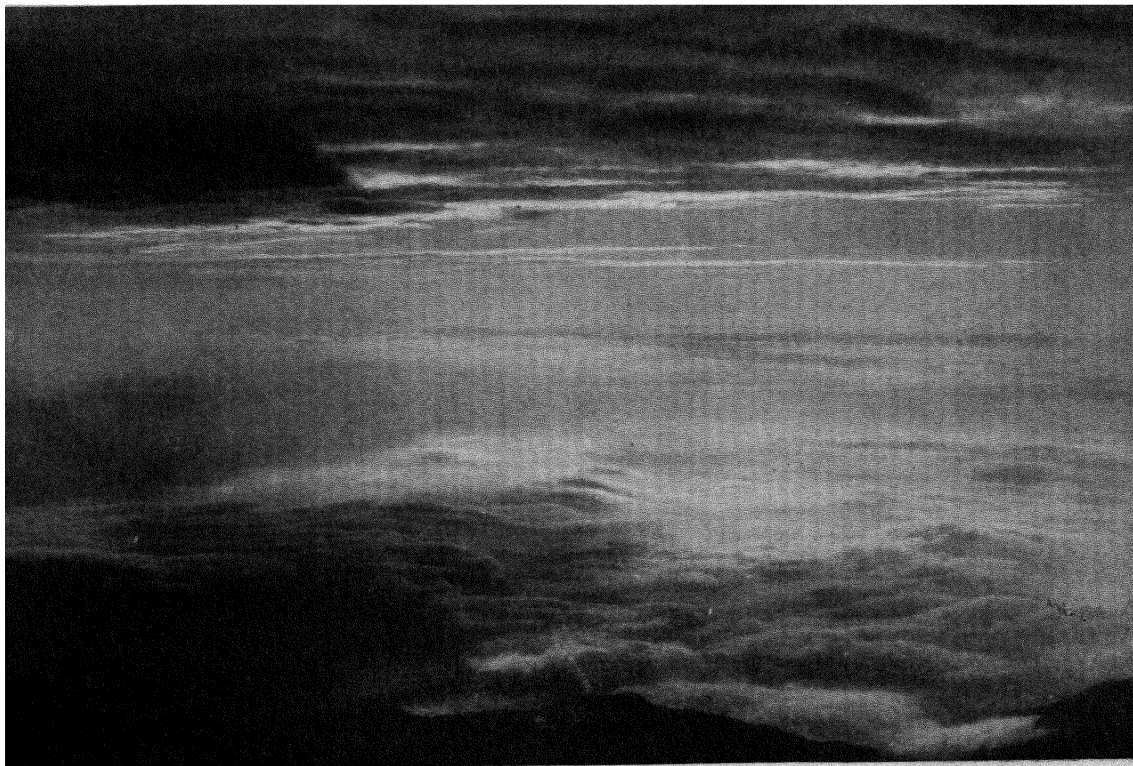


WHEN THE HUMID SHADOWS HOVER

for a dictionary of flame from which to select vocabulary wherewith to declare the bewilderment of color to that river and that sky-drench of unutterable ruby, carbuncle, garnet, and every namable scarlet, crimson, wine-red, blood-red! Jumble them all into an ecstasy of conflagration, set river and sky on fire, grip the sky to a standstill, and let the river push on till at last there remains only a rim of spent flame scarlet, and we shall have a dilution of what I, a passenger on a railway, saw that morning on the Missouri River—in a brief space, the time a little boat would have rowed across a little harbor when I watched the river at the hour when darkness gave place to dawn and the invisible stream became rapturous, indescribable, unforgettable—an ecstasy fit to be framed and hung along the hallway of eternity for the delight of the immortals.

WHEN clouds give reports of portentous skies, of prepending tempests, when they are black as pools of midnight water, their eminences wrinkled as if zigzag lightnings had been the shears which cut their patterns, then as the sun lurches behind their darkness, the fine fire that rims them and seizes all their peaks gives a touch of delirium to the soul. It is as if that is what we would have done had we been artists of celestial birth. No "Oh's" nor "Ah's" break the silence, but a hushing hand is laid across our lips.

A mountain range is bursting into conflagration; that is all we see, and that is enough. Clouds had been awakening or are falling asleep. Clouds give pageants and banners of fire; and all the radiances known to artist's gamut fail. As I have watched that holy resurrection called the dawn, how often have I seen the herald clouds take fire at approach of the sun! They became like angels garmented in flame. All the heavenly headlands put out banners which rose and fell as fingered by pulsing winds and at the night I have seen all the heavens grow rapturous. In the west a glory kindled, the clouds caught fire, and there was conflagration like a prairie fire running before a mighty wind. Every least and every largest cloud courted the flames, and then the clouds at the east were touched by the fire, and clear across the heavens and in the southern skies and far along the dimming north every sunset sail would embrace the sunset until across the heavens the spaces open to my eyes were as if a fisher fleet innumerable with ruby sails were sailing out into the dusk of the night to let down its nets. Ah me, what golden hours have I had and laughter of spirit in watching the falling asleep of the sky and the hanging of the evening star when God has hung his clouds to answer that God is light as he also is glory!



CLOUDS UNDER FOOT

NATURE is no ditto mark. She knows not how to repeat. She is not singer of a song which however oft repeated differs in naught. As the music was written by the composer, so the singer carols it. We fault not the singers, only we may not rank nature with the singers of set songs. Nature will improvise—you cannot restrain her. Into the violin she will introduce a 'cello note and into the organ grandeur of the moaning sea she will fling a flute note, clear, far-carrying, and sweet. This may stand as the symbol of the diversity of nature's ways. The way we think things will be is not how they are. They defy all prophecy. They delight in dodging like a boy at play.

Now, as to sunsets and sunrisings, who that ever watched them but knows that no two ever were alike? Can God paint new sunsets through a century of days? So it appears. God is very versatile. For happy years now has this writer been watcher of the set and rise of suns, and no two has he met which were really on confidential terms. When a sky is clear as over wide water, then sunset is less individual. Sunset on the sea is the least interesting sunset God has made. Those who talk in unmeasured laudation of sea sunsets are probably those who have little gift of viewing sunsets. Sunsets are sky incidents. The sea gathers a glory from the departing day or holds in an afterglow; and careless beholders count this a sunset and make much comment thereon, whereas the sunsets on the

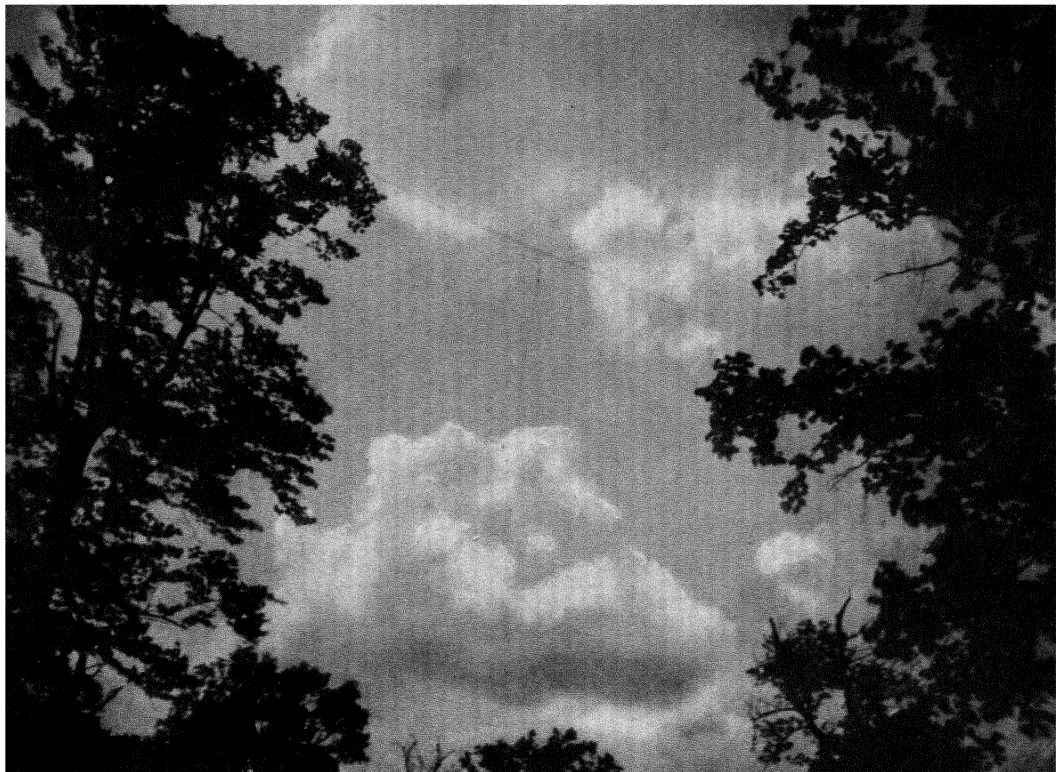
land are the brave sunsets. There the glory burns. I have viewed few eventful sunsets on the sea and only when clouds sailed their fleets along the sunset sky. But on the land, where dust has lifted into the sky, there sunsets have their way. Thus may we account for sunsets being with more unanimity glorious than the sunrisings. The dew of the night subdues the fretful dust so that the rising beams of the sun shoot athwart fewer prisms to change white light into abundant glory. But if observers of sunrise and sunset were inquired of as to when these daily miracles were most abundant beauty, the reply would be, unhesitant, "In summer." The dust of the ground and the dust of the sky, to wit, the mists, are in summer at crescendo. The thunder heads which float their bergs along the sunset lines are often fleets of flame, wild conflagrations which bid words to be hushed. When the first summer cloud makes advent I celebrate the day. Winter is past; spring is fully come when such bergs float along the blue sea surface of the heavens.

However, I am of the opinion that in a lifetime of watching sunrise and sunset with expectant eyes and recording the impression of a thousand glories I have so beheld that this winter has set an unexampled splendor in my memory. All the supposed strained effects of Turner which the unobserving have accused that great master of seeing were less vivid than these extravagances of color mine eyes have seen in this winter weather. They have each been alike in this



CLOUDED OVER

strange quality—that instead of their effects being water-color productions they have been metallic tints. Each sunset and sunrise of unusual glory is as if it had been flame in a vapor from a furnace in which the fuel was various metals. The clouds were burnished and the spirals were such as might have been smoked up out of some volcano in the sun. I had thought myself initiated in cloud splendor. With thanksgiving to the versatile God I acknowledge myself a probationer. This persistency of metallic flame along the east and west can scarcely be set down to accident. Metallic the clouds surely were. It has grown on me that our atmosphere is sifted full of dust or vapor from the comet, which swims suddenly into our sky. Some years ago when a certain volcano was in eruption at the other side of the globe there was a persistency of splendid afterglows on this side of the world which I had not witnessed before nor since. The hot hearth of the sun glowed like a furnace after the day was spent. The dust of one angry mountain had saturated a planetary atmosphere. Now, something of the same wonder is on, but with a distinct metallic radiance which I surmise is in some way of comet origin. Anyhow the facts are to be accounted for, they are so unusual. That in the lifetime of a man no such spectacle had been exhibited in the heavens is fitted to give wings to speculation. Guessing is not inadmissible. Though what causes the glory is of less consequence than the glory, yet is the cause worthy to be inquired after.



Sky Billows

A BOOK OF CLOUDS

SUNRISE and sunset effects have been noted over a wide zone of territory stretching from the Great Lakes to the southern sea. I shall name one advent and one dismissal of the day as specimens.

The sunrise was seen in Iowa. The world was snow-bound. The shivering landscape near and remote was an illimitable stretch of snow. No spots of black earth peered through the garments of winter white. The roads, even in the towns, were highways of snow. And the morning climbed the east. The heavens were glorious. It seemed the sun's coronation day. Unimaginable splendors burned and would not cease. The clouds billowed away far, and farther flakes of fire like pieces of chain armor dashed with blood and the metal of the armor lustering through. I am on a Pullman and lift my curtain and behold an apocalypse! The clouds climb to the zenith and all are wonder-lit. Pinks shine at the crest of the heavens and amazed crimsons at the horizon line. Words cannot be mustered to express the facts. I attempt no description: I name a glory. I watched to let God see one watcher was out when he walked abroad along the open roadways of a winter sky. The clouds were without definite form. In summer each cloud had taken shape. These reminded you of no shape save the cunning pictures of an armorer's art, howbeit an armorer in whom was deft and strange design beyond what earthly armorer ever knew. There the metallic



A Highway Shall Be There

glory burned till the sun was well up and had had his advent heralded to all the sky, and then the metal flames burned low, and—oh, the pity of it!—then burned out.

The dismissal of the day was a sunset in Oklahoma. I consider it the climax of heavenly wonder I have seen in my glad years. Low against the earth the clouds were, a world conflagration, steady, uninterruptible as if all this world were a vast cinder, glowing, fervid, which filled the hearth of the sky. The flames seemed to gather fury. Cessation appeared impossible. The universe might have been on fire. It minded you of apocalyptic mood of world and sky, and, had the Revelator been with me, he, I felt, could have melted precious stones into colors meet to fit the glory. Ruby, garnet, zircon, carbuncle all melted together would have fused scanter crimson than the flame I saw. But, alas, the Revelator was not there! Just above the wild catastrophe of lurid cinder recumbent on the land edge lay an open sea, blue as wet violet. I had not seen such drunken violet in mid-June skies that lift above a world at flower. The sky shone blue as if in sheer independency of glory and antagonism of glory. It was a chaos of cobalts. There they were antagonists in glory, a sky which utterly refused to surrender a single violet tint and a forge which would not surrender one fierce coal from its fierce hearth. Then all the high sky was on fire. The clouds were mackerel clouds, which are usually sad



HERALD CLOUDS

silver, but to-night all mackerel clouds were variegated fire. Opalescent was the right word if right word there were to serve the need. Clouds ran south and north and to the zenith then to the east, drifting like curtains hanging when winds are almost but not altogether still, while, to the farthest east, still fire, but gentler, kindlier, until there were pinks at last like wild rose petals seen at dusk.

Northward, another open patch of sky—a sea reefed with clouds. Its color I have not seen and shall not, as I think. It was blue, but not of amethyst nor sapphire, but of blue china, faintly blue, delicately blue, spectrally blue—that last phrase is best I think too—a blue that startled you to fear, as if you must inquire, "What ails the sky that it hath such wan sky luster?" And all the reefs were fire as if some submerged volcano were thrusting up from under sea its edge of fire. Then suddenly the sky was one wild and far regatta of banners, banners, banners beyond counting, and beyond all save rapture. From every heavenly headland as from every mast of ships innumerable the heavenly banners fly. What triumph the sky had that night no angel was near to tell, but only the heavenly banners waving, waving like the flutter of wings. In heaven I shall behold no stranger glory. "It hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive" radiancy and in diversity such as that evening God gave in wild abundance of glory to his winter sky.

And, at the last, looking across wastes of shadow-



BANNERS OF CLOUDS

ing land into wastes of sky in conflagration when this apocalypse winged its way from very far off to my immortality, my heart said, "Let us pray"; and so we did. And God heard our prayer.

OF clouds in form or texture or tint I cannot say, "I love this most." All I can muster for my words is, "I love this last." It is like the last kiss on the lips of wife and child, last come, come sweetest.

If the art-shaping of clouds be considered, then is there an endless challenge to the eyes. Not all I have seen in any gallery whether of statuary in Pentelic marbles or drowsy bronze or painted contours on springing wall or lordly ceilings match such as I have seen in the far fair skies in a lifetime watching the clouds. All dreams of the great Raphaels and giant-spirited Angelos have I seen put to naught because more gigantically done in the heavens. Our puny vastnesses are miniature paintings and sculpturings when put alongside the artist prodigalities in the skies. All landscapes, all hollows between rolling hills, all aspiring in bulked mountains climbing into dawn, all stretch of desert kissed with the ardent sun and deluged with a cataract of fire, all are mute prophecies of what I have seen in Alps climbing in the wandering clouds when inconceivable heights are grown upon the bosom of the storm. All kindly har-

bors of the bewearied ships, all mountains based in shadows and pinnacled in glory hallowed, all companies of children, and gatherings of armies with banners and dust under their multitudinous marching feet, and fortresses they stormed and cities they took and armies they put to rout, and hallowed walls of temples built beyond the murk of our poor night whose walls celestial climb, and in gray towers where golden bells ring radiant chimes, and where the multitudes come with vast accord to worship Him who hung the dawn and made the clouds and lit them with his shadow since they could not bear His light—these have I seen in clouds that have invaded my skies.

I read of God, "He maketh the clouds his chariots." But they are also the smiling and the laughter of his heart. And of a cloud (as if to render it sacred forever) it is recorded concerning the Christ, "as they were looking he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight." How holy is a cloud!

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